

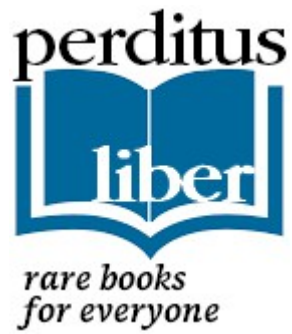
"HERE COMES SOMEBODY"

by BEN HUR
LAMPMAN



DRAWINGS BY

MAHON BLAINE



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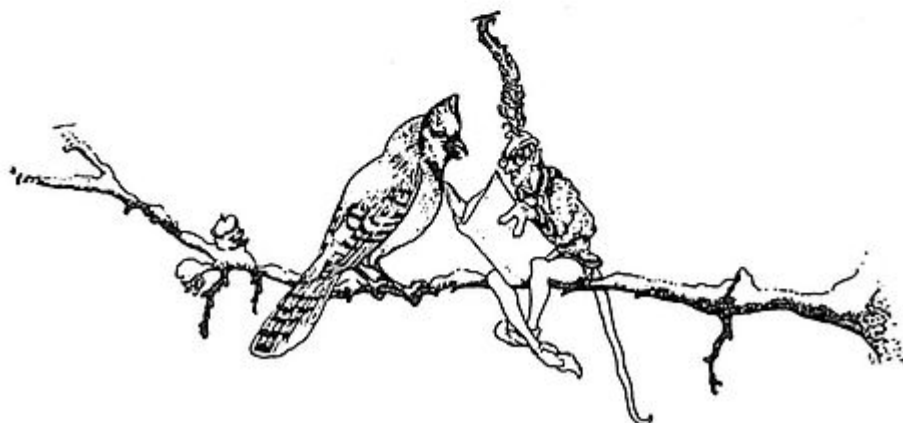
Here Comes Somebody

by

Ben Hur Lampman

Published 1935

HERE COMES SOMEBODY





The Dark Woman whispered and whispered

HERE COMES SOMEBODY

By
BEN HUR LAMPMAN

ILLUSTRATED
WITH DRAWINGS

BY
MAHLON
BLAINE



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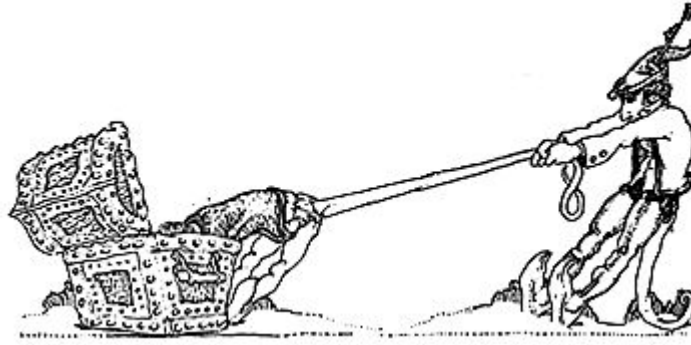
TO MY YOUNGER DAUGHTER
HOPE HATHAWAY,
IN PROOF OF THIS-NAMELY
THAT A PROMISE IS
NOT ALWAYS A
PIECRUST



Dreaming beside the river,
 He saw the Dark Woman pass—
Her stride from hill to hollow
 Was as the wind on the grass;
Girt were her limbs with the golden
 Weave of the ripened grain,
Her wild geese strove at her shoulder—
 She held in leash the rain.

—*Darkling She Strode to Westward.*





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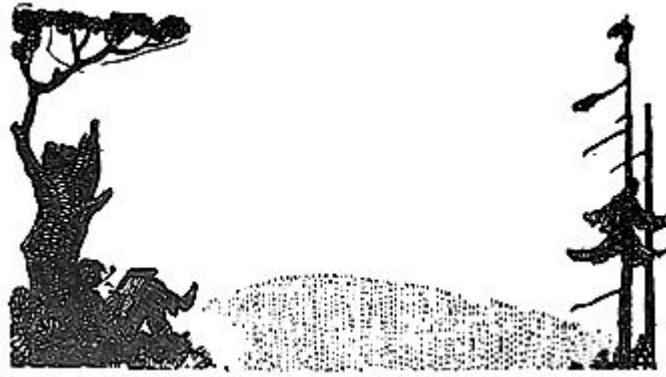
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HERE COMES SOMEBODY





CHAPTER I.

Being the beginning of the story of Mary Elizabeth who lived at Back of Beyond.—Of how she went to Horsefoot in quest of Old Susie.—Of her meeting with the Dark Woman who held a cougar to heel.—Treating also of that which was whispered.—And of their laughter.—Of how Mary Elizabeth was astonished to have lost the lake.



THIS is the story of Mary Elizabeth, a girl with hair dark as beech leaves, and three freckles on her nose, and mist-gray eyes, who lived with her aunt and uncle on a lone farm at Back of Beyond, where Nobody to Speak of Ever Came and Nothing Much Ever Happened. The name of the pond in the hills is Horsefoot Lake, and the lake is all silence, and sedges, and drifting wood ducks. It is the tale of a day's happenings, written down precisely as these befell, or almost; and if you read it with tongue in cheek none will blame you. Because you aren't expected to believe it—unless you, too, have met the Dark Woman and held speech with her, in your time.

Mary Elizabeth was reading *Ivanhoe* beneath a tree that showered her with snowy petals. Yet she wasn't

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really reading, if you understand what is meant. The breakfast dishes were shining in their cupboard. The house had been swept and dusted. It wasn't time yet to go down to the mail box, and it was much too soon to be thinking of getting dinner. They called it dinner at Back of Beyond. Up in the whiteness of the tree the wild bees were toiling for their queen. And from the clothesline her Aunt Emma was taking down the wash, all sweetened by dew, and sunshine, and the hill wind.

“Your mother was a great hand for reading, too,” observed Aunt Emma, mumbling a clothespin. “Do take your nose out of that book, Mary Elizabeth! Don’t you think you ought to look around a bit for Old Susie? I expect she’s gone and had her calf somewheres.”

“Yes, auntie,” answered Mary Elizabeth, withdrawing her nose. She marked the place with a grass blade and left her book under the apple tree.

Of folks-with-their-noses-in-books, as she styled them, Aunt Emma was inwardly in awe. But for their chastening she contrived an amused attitude of semi-scorn, which was as well her own defense. She was accustomed to declare that all a body needed for literary refreshment, was the Good Book and a trustworthy almanac. The Old Testament was her unfailing drama, and the New Testament her rod and her staff. An almanac was the sum of science and of learning. Moreover, it was in almanacs that one recorded the setting of hens. Uncle Henry, on the contrary, was justly proud of his more liberal views. He was, in a way, a great comfort to Mary Elizabeth. For he esteemed himself a rather well-read man, and occasionally said that when he found the time he would read another book. As it was, he recalled with vague delight the far-away wonder and literary charm of “Frank on a Gunboat,” and “The Swiss Family Robinson.” And Mary Elizabeth,

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who loved both aunt and uncle, often reflected that but for the relatively enlightened Uncle Henry her days at Back of Beyond would lack the key that unlocked them.

It was nine o’clock in June, and the sleepy morning wonder of the month was on the hills. The scalawag crows in the fir trees cawed as though they were drowsy. Dewey the dog was dreaming on the stoop. Yowler the yellow cat was asleep by the brown churn. You could smell the bread that baked in the kitchen. The cherries were just beginning to turn. And the sweetbrier to breathe across the pasture. The narrow gray road, quite without a person on it, for a long curving mile, went ribboning away down to the valley. The road gave forth the scent of dew on dust.

“I suspect she’ll have had it near Horsefoot,” suggested Aunt Emma, and bagged another clothespin. “She most generally has ’em there.”

“All right, auntie,” said Mary Elizabeth.

So Mary Elizabeth went southward through the clover, the golden bees rising at her feet, the pink print of her dress glowing against the greenness of things. She climbed the rail fence lithely, and she spoke with a

grandfather ground squirrel, standing sentinel before his burrow, as she entered the blossoming steeple-bush that fringed the forest. The path was dark. The path was cool. There was a smell of wet fern. And Mary Elizabeth went dutifully toward Horsefoot.

But she wasn't thinking of Old Susie, dearly as she loved the red cow, while she walked. She was thinking of the gray road twisting down to the valley, down and down from Back of Beyond, the road that was so seldom traveled. If only it were traveled more often. If only it would be. But it was traveled so seldom, so very seldom, that whoever first descried the traveler called happily, thrillingly, with unrestrained excitement, back

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to the others, "Here comes somebody!" You could see the wayfarer at a great distance, driving or plodding along the road, his face set toward Back of Beyond. And Dewey would bark with the wonder of it. And Yowler would wake with shining topaz eyes of half-feigned alarm. Now who could it be that was coming up the gray road? For somebody surely was coming. But it happened so very seldom.

So Mary Elizabeth drew near to Horsefoot Lake, and for a long way before she came to it she could smell the sweet decay of the sedges. She passed across the little sward where the yellow violets were, that love the seepage of the pond, and thrust the bending willows aside. There was Horsefoot! With a drake wood duck curving up from it glintingly, smitten to strange fires, and piping sadly as a plover. The girl widened her eyes with happy wonder, and narrowed them with joy. She loved the lake and the talking silence of it, and the amazement of discovering it always just beyond the willows. She looked dutifully about. But of Old Susie there wasn't a sight nor a sound. Call to her, Mary Elizabeth.

"Co, boss! Co, boss! C-o-o-o!"

There wasn't even a tinkle.

Then Mary Elizabeth sat down beside the lake, which was the sensible thing to do, and let the cool dimness of cedar, the thoughtful shadow of it, settle all round her. And a small brown bird with a white stripe over his pate began to praise things as they are. A lazy trout wrought a lazy circle on the water. She fell to thinking of the road again. The cedar stirred to a whisper, so low, so intimate, so sweetly sad and fond, that the tree seemed to be singing to her under its breath. A chipmunk emerged from the willows, twitching along, hesitant, yet bearing his plume bravely. He drew so



"Call to her, Mary Elizabeth"

near to her she might have stretched a hand to touch him. The sighing of the cedar did become a song. And in trying to understand the words, to strain them from the music, she quite forgot the road that went down to the valley. Surely there must be words to the song of a cedar.

"Of what are you thinking, Mary Elizabeth?"

It happened just like that, which is nearly always the way things happen. One moment she had been soul-alone by Horsefoot, listening to the cedar, and on the next the Dark Woman stood beside her, smiling down with red, full lips that seemed to grieve while they smiled. The eyes of the woman

were like the sky before rain, the voice of her as the wind in the cedar, her cheek was the hue of an opening grape leaf, and she was tall, and brown, and comely. In the crook of her arm nestled a wild rabbit, and beneath her left hand stood a tawny great cougar with purrings in its throat. But Mary Elizabeth wasn't astonished. And she wasn't in the least afraid. It was to her as though she had known the Dark Woman always.

"I was thinking of everything," she answered, "and whether there are words to trees."

"Of course there are."

The drake wood duck drove in from westward to circle Horsefoot. They could see the gloss of his crest, the white ribbon running down it, the immaculate linen of his throat, and the warm wine of his waistcoat. There were glints of gold in the greenness of his wing-and tail-coverts. He drew another circle with his return and sat riding in it as it widened, the wise wild head turning nervously this way and that. The tawniness beside the Dark Woman ceased purring, and silken ripples fled over him, nose to tail.

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"Be quiet, Monster!" his mistress bade him. The cougar yawned redly.

"He must be a very tame cougar, m'am," said Mary Elizabeth. "I never heard of a cougar that would mind when it was spoken to. Even Yowler doesn't always mind. Of course, Yowler isn't a cougar, but he's a kind of cougar, I guess." She remembered her manners tardily and would have risen.

"No, please, Mary Elizabeth," the Dark Woman dissuaded. "It isn't necessary. Heavens above, child! Not for me, of all persons. And, besides, I'm tired too. A little. People seem to think I never get weary. But I do. Not that it matters, for I'm never happy unless I'm doing something. If you don't mind—"

And she dropped lightly, fluently, down beside the girl. It was odd that Mary Elizabeth hadn't noticed the Dark Woman's gown until then. It was blent of the colors of leaves and grasses, of sprouting corn-lands and ripening harvest, in every hue and tinting, and it was set with living stars. There was a girdle of suns, and the low bosom of the gown was caught with the crescent moon. The Dark Woman brushed back a tendril of hair from her brave forehead. Her hair was dark as twelve, but there was a brownness in it, too, like flame subdued.

“It is a wild, wild cougar, really,” she resumed. “And he wanted ever so dearly to catch the wood duck yonder—though he wouldn’t care to try because of the water. You wanted to, didn’t you, Monster? And that is the law, Mary Elizabeth. But I am a law unto myself.”

The rabbit stirred in her arms, its ears lifting, and looked up at her. She stroked the softness of its fur.

“Monster hurt the rabbit quite early this morning,” she explained. “You see, he couldn’t find a deer anywhere. And he had leaped twice at a grouse, to have it

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go booming away without leaving him so much as a feather. Hadn’t you, Monster? He was feeling about under a log for the rabbit when I found him. And he had scratched it a little. But we’ll make it well, won’t we?” She snuggled the rabbit to her cheek.

The cougar flashed an oblique glance at the rabbit, and the tip of his long, long tail lashed ever so slightly. But he yawned again on the instant, as though it were all in innocence, slumped heavily into a tawny huddle and fell fast asleep.

Mary Elizabeth felt that she had known the Dark Woman always, and realized, too, that it was ever so nice to be with her, to have the nearness of her so comfortably near, and not to be the least little bit curious. As they sat beside Horsefoot, under the cedar, and talked and talked.

She told the Dark Woman how they played at “Here comes somebody!” and of how infrequently it happened that anybody really came, because they lived at Back of Beyond. And of how her Aunt Emma was always too busied with churning, or weeding, or baking, or soap-making, or something, ever to talk with her of anything else. And of how her Uncle Henry really had too much to do, with grubbing, and burning, and plowing, and planting, and mowing, and cutting, and digging, and milking, ever to be otherwise than clean tuckered-out when night came. And he couldn’t talk after supper, because so soon as he had his shoes off, and was leaning back in the rocker to twiddle his toes, he was instantly and audibly asleep. He had to be roused three or four times before he was awake enough to go to bed. And nobody ever really came to Back of Beyond. It was so far. So very far from anywhere.

She confided to the Dark Woman that the first sweetbrier, when the pinkness of the buds was breaking,

and the breath of the sweetbrier was over the pasture, always wrought a wetness in her eyes. The Dark Woman said she knew, too, for sweetbrier served her exactly that way. And didn't the Dark Woman love night best without a moon, the deepness of the sky sprinkled with stars and wild goose trumpets? The Dark Woman considered such a night to be the best of all. But there was something to be said for the moon. Didn't the Dark Woman care dearly for night when it was all moon-flooded, and the moon a huge, bright dollar in the sky, and the shadows of the alders long and secret? The Dark Woman answered that such a night forever moved her strangely, and she thought it quite superior to other sorts of nights, say what you would.

Mary Elizabeth sighed happily. It was so pleasant to have somebody to whom one could talk like this, and who would understand, and who wouldn't exclaim "Nonsense!" Though Aunt Emma always exclaimed it kindly enough. But there was something in Aunt Emma's voice when she said "Nonsense!" that caused you to think she really meant "Wait a while, and you'll see!" The girl sighed blissfully again, and moved her cheek against the cool, encircling arm. For a time the two were silent. Then the Dark Woman was speaking again.

"I have thought it all out for you, dear," said the Dark Woman at long last. "They mean well. Let's see." She cupped the curve of her chin in a brown palm and looked and looked at Horsefoot. The girl could almost hear her thinking. Yes. She could hear it! And it was like the drowsy, dim-winged droning of bees above the clover. It was like something dear that has been forgotten, and yet is almost within touch of memory.

"I think you'll have to go away for a while," said

the Dark Woman presently. "Aunt Emma won't know that you've really gone, because, as I say, she has quite forgotten. Yes, I've seen to all that."

"Go away!" cried Mary Elizabeth, and there was a small tremor of fear that was gladness in her voice. "Why, I never! But you'll come with me, won't you, Dark Woman?"

"Haven't I always and always been with you, Lisbeth?" (What a dear name it is, thought the girl, the way she says it.) "It isn't seeing that

matters, child. It's being. So you mustn't mind if you cannot see me. But you must do as I say. Listen."

Here the Dark Woman glanced all around and about. The curve of her lips danced merrily, and there was no longer any sadness on the wine-red mouth. Her eyes were wide and mirthful. She bent near to the dark hair of the girl, her arm over the thin shoulder, and began to whisper. The breath of her was something of the sweetness of the butterfly bush by the woodshed, and something of the coolness of the spring in the meadow, and a trifle of sweetbrier, and a trace of April rain. The fond nearness of her caused Mary Elizabeth again to stroke the encircling arm with her cheek. The Dark Woman whispered and whispered.

What was it she whispered to Mary Elizabeth, under the cedar by Horsefoot? One is sure one cannot say. But beneath the sun-tan a color came and went, and came again, as though it were meant for a ripening fruit, and hadn't quite made up its mind. The nose of Mary Elizabeth, and the three freckles on it, wriggled funnily, dearly, and her gray eyes were wide as the woman's. The Dark Woman whispered no longer. She drew back and looked at the girl. In the look were humor, and triumph, and tenderness.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary Elizabeth.

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And "Oh!" she cried again.

Then she laughed and laughed. She laughed like April when the sun is out and everything is new. The Dark Woman was laughing. But she laughed like summer's self, when fruit is on the bending bough. And their laughter rang off and away through the forest of Back of Beyond. They laughed until the tears ran down their faces, and the cougar roused to stare at them. Then the cougar yawned redly again. It was that sort of cougar. And what they laughed about one cannot say.

"I suppose I ought to be going," said the Dark Woman when they had dried their eyes and were merely sitting there smiling one at another. "But I sha'n't ever be far from you. And you'll always remember, won't you?"

"Yes'm," promised the girl.

"You see," explained the Dark Woman, "there's a setting of grouse eggs I simply must attend to this very morning. Goodness knows I've put it off long enough."

“Oh, tell me, where is the nest?” cried Mary Elizabeth—for she was like that about grouse nests.

The Dark Woman bent her broad brow to momentary perplexity.

“That I can’t say,” she answered. “For there aren’t any eggs yet and there isn’t any nest. And I haven’t decided whether it is to be here or in Lonesome county. All I’ve really determined is that they shall build the nest seven years from now. It’s this way, Mary Elizabeth. The grouse that are to build the nest aren’t even hatched yet, nor their grandparents. I’ve all that to attend to, and it’s quite a problem.”

“Why, I never heard of such a thing!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth.

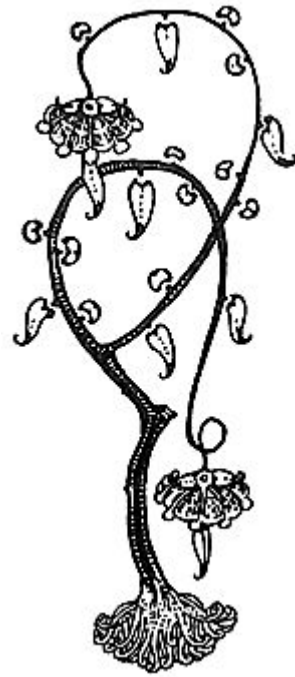
“That’s just it,” agreed the Dark Woman. “People can’t realize my responsibilities and what I find to do.

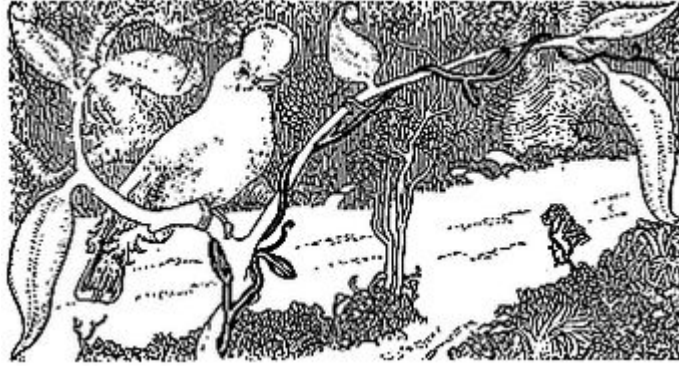
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I’ll have Old Susie under the alders in time enough. When the shadow of the cedar falls there.” She pointed.

“Goodby, Mary Elizabeth!”

The girl sprang to her feet. Was that what the cedar had been sighing and singing? No. It had been something else. But where had the Dark Woman gone, all in a moment? Why, there wasn’t any cedar and there wasn’t any lake! And all the forest was different somehow, and there was a highway threading it, a pavement of rounded cobbles that vanished in leafy distance. The very idea!





CHAPTER II.

Which discovers Mary Elizabeth on a strange highway.—And tells of several quite remarkable leave-takings.—Of that first greeting on the cobbles, and the name that was given her.—How those two drank from a wayside fountain, on which was carved a most perplexing message.—And of how Mary Elizabeth saved the wild woods rabbit.

NOW Mary Elizabeth was aware that she stood where a minor road merged with the main, and she surmised quite naturally that she had traveled one to find the other—though for the life of her she just couldn't remember. But she set this puzzle aside as of small worth, for everything was quite strange and curious. The trees beside the roadway were not those of her mountains—the cedars, spruces, alders and yews. They were such as she never had seen before. Their foliage was most green and luxuriant, and many of them were in singular, bright blossom. And birds went in and out of them, threading the clear air with song and color, such birds as she had never beheld. She could see up and down the broad highway, with its rounded cobbles, to where it was lost in leafage, but no traveler was thereon.

Turning to glance again backward over the minor road she was amazed to perceive another Mary Elizabeth standing there—and greater far was her astonishment to comprehend that this was herself on yesterday. For the frock was of blue polkadots, and there were berry stains here and there upon it. And it had been yesterday that she had found the first of the wild blackberries for Aunt Emma. She thought it very odd, indeed, that she herself should stand there gazing gravely at yesterday's Mary Elizabeth, but

before the marvel of this had quite mastered her, she perceived the lane to be populous with Mary Elizabeths of other yesterdays, dwindling away into dimness. There was herself, as she had been when school was out, with the torn stocking. And another Mary Elizabeth with her hair done up for the first time. And there she was in her first apron, that now was pieces in a quilt, and the quilt in the best bedroom. And a girl that smiled over a valentine of scarlet and gilt. And there she was again, much further removed, and ever so young, with the furs Uncle Henry had made from the pelt of the gray fox. Most strange it was, the day so warm and all, to see the glint of snow upon the fur. And yonder, where the Mary Elizabeths became vague as dream and were lost to vision, stood the shadowy little girl that must have been she—the shy, sad, tearful little girl—that day the mail carrier brought her to Back of Beyond. They were like living pictures from an album. With a tenderness that was not all of self, she held out her hands to them yearningly. Then every one of them waved to her and smiled. She thought she heard them calling her name in farewell. And they were gone, as a breath from a window-pane. It seemed a very lonely forest. But she put them almost out of mind.

“I’m sure I don’t know which way she meant me to

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take,” mused Mary Elizabeth, striving to recall what the Dark Woman had said of the highway. “When I face as I am standing now, then I should go This Way, while behind me would be That Way. But I’ve only to turn around and This Way will be That Way and That Way will be This. Oh, bother!”

And she stood there pondering, though truth to tell she rather enjoyed her puzzlement. She stood there and watched the birds for a time. One of them was very much like a robin, except for its plumage, which was bottle green, and save for its beak, which was curved like a parrot’s, and but for its eyes, which were deeply, sagely orange. Nevertheless, it was in all other respects very much like a robin. She felt her throat tighten for the robins in the apple trees of home. But this never would do.

“It’s a queer country that doesn’t put signboards up for people,” she said to herself. “At the foot of our hill, it tells you how far it is to Cloverdale, and how many miles to the city. But here there isn’t anything. It’s a funny, funny country, if you ask me.”

Of course nobody had asked her, but even as she was about to reply to herself, she tensed to a posture of listening. Hark! Be still, birds. Be silent, leaves. Hark! The sound came down the road behind her, and at times she could hear it clearly, and at times it was not to be heard. It was the sound of whistling, and there wasn't any tune to it. It was just whistling. But ever it came nearer and clearer. Mary Elizabeth remembered what she had been told under the cedar, and hurriedly patted her hair, and gave the pink frock a jerk or so, and wished for a mirror or a pool.

"Here comes somebody!" she breathed.

And with that she began to contemplate the tips of the trees across the highway. It appeared she was pleased

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with them, for her mouth was fixed in a small, contemplative smile, and her eyes were tranced as those of the saint at the organ. The whistling was very near to her. The tread of feet on the cobbles. A boy strode past.

You would have said that Mary Elizabeth scarcely saw him, and that if she did see him, well, anyway, she wasn't in the least interested. For still she regarded the tree-tops, where they swayed and bowed to the breeze, and still she smiled as at a vision far removed. But you should best believe that she missed none of him, since we are indebted to Mary Elizabeth for all that is known of his appearance that day in the forest. And touching upon this matter, though in other descriptive endeavors sometimes inexact, Mary Elizabeth was nothing if not explicit.

To begin with, he was a nice boy. So much should have been evident to even the dullest observer. He was neither tall nor short, nor pudgy, nor slim, and his eyes were a warm and enterprising blue, and his hair was the color of ripened corn-husks, and his nose was straight, but not too straight, and his ears—which were in no-wise meagre—did not cling to his head conventionally, but stood somewhat outward and forth, in the most fetching manner imaginable. He was dressed in denims, with gaiters of threadbare canvas, and his scuffed shoes were laced with thongs that had been mended by knots. He wore a checkered cap that once had been gray. Its peak was bent and broken, and it was blotched with sundry stains—as, indeed, was all his raiment—but he wore the cap jauntily, as though it were a broad hat with a scarlet feather. And he wore it tilted slightly, but engagingly, over his right eye. Do you quite comprehend? He wore it tilted somewhat over his eye!

Thus the boy strode past. And he strode like a grenadier going to call on the colonel, so that you would have

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vowed he, for his part, was utterly unaware of the girl beside the highway—as unaware of her as she seemed of him. But on the smoothness of the boy's cheek burned a color that was not prompted by the sun. Moreover, he strode the least trifle too stiffly, and held his eyes the least bit too fixedly before him. And his lips were pursed to a whistle that was not issuing thence. But these matters are dwelt on overlong. All that is of really important significance is that the boy strode past. And Mary Elizabeth felt her heart sink within her. She felt it huddle down to sigh. She began to doubt the Dark Woman, and distress shook her as if it had been shame. It was so lonely on the road. Nevertheless, she forbore to glance after him, and continued her scrutiny of the tree-tops.

Twenty paces from her the boy slackened his stride. At thirty he loitered, and at forty he faltered, halted, and rather elaborately essayed to dislodge a pebble from his left shoe. This achieved, he looked backward along the road—but not at the statuesque pink print—and began softly to whistle again. Something on a bending bush caught his roving eye, and he broke a branch from the bush. This he regarded intently, turning it over and over. And then, with a resolute fling of his broad young shoulders, he faced squarely about and came slowly toward the girl. She had no look to give him. Hawk above the tree tops, whither are you hunting? Rumpled cloud in blue heaven, where does your shadow fall? But her heart was pounding, beating, thundering—until she was certain he must hear it.

The boy had stopped before her. He was plainly ill at ease. Mary Elizabeth withdrew her gaze from the crest of the forest with a little start of astonishment. She considered him coolly. Her look implied that presently, when she had replied to him, he should go his

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way that she might resume her contemplations. He thrust the broken twig under her very nose—not rudely, you conceive, but necessarily. Glowing in the foliage were fat golden berries.

“What kind of berries are those?” asked the boy.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Mary Elizabeth—and she tried her hardest to sniff.

“Well, you live around here, I guess,” grumbled the boy.

“Oh, you guess, do you?” mocked the girl.

“Don’t you?”

“Do I?”

And Mary Elizabeth resumed her study of the tree-tops.

“It’s no use,” said the boy.

“It’s no use what?” inquired Mary Elizabeth.

“No use pretending,” he said.

“I’m sure I’m not pretending, thank you!” sniffed Mary Elizabeth. That was better. She felt that the sniff had really been worthy of her.

“Well, you are pretending, all the same!” he exclaimed. “You know as well as I do that I had to bring them back.”

“Bring what back?” inquired Mary Elizabeth, and her eyes widened amazingly.

“Come off!” he said. “You know I had to bring these berries back to you. I don’t care what those-old berries are. Please let’s not pretend any longer.”

“Well,” she agreed judicially, “I’m not pretending, but I’m willing to stop it, if you are.”

They stood there on the cobbles of the highway and took stock of one another. It was perhaps essential that he should, but as for Mary Elizabeth—well, as for her, perhaps it was essential, too. And their eyes were dancing, and meeting, and laughing, in that way eyes should

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meet, and dance, and laugh—and there’s little harm in it—when eyes encounter on the highway.

So they began walking down the highway together. And they were comrades.

“What is your name?” the boy asked.

“I am called Mary Elizabeth,” she answered. “And what is your name?”

“I am called James Christopher.”

You see, they didn’t bother about last names, and this is ever more convenient than conventional.

“I’ll call you Lisbeth,” said the boy firmly.

“Aunt Emma doesn’t approve of nicknames,” she protested.

“Tain’t one,” insisted James Christopher. “Anyway, you needn’t be afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“I shan’t call you Lizzie.”

“And I shall call you—let me see—I shall call you Jumbles.”

“But it sounds like a breakfast food.”

“It’s because of—well, it’s just because,” she explained. For how could she tell him it was because of his ears?

“Oh, I don’t care,” he agreed. “Nobody ever calls me James Christopher anyway. I only told you because I had to. Come on, Lisbeth.”

And there was nobody traveling the cobbled highway, save only those two. It ran away before them as they talked, and whither it went they neither knew nor cared.

Mary Elizabeth told him of her aunt and her uncle, and the farm at Back of Beyond. And of Yowler, the yellow cat. And of Dewey the dog. And of the apple trees. And of the milking, the mowing, the plowing, the sowing, the churning, the burning, the mending, the

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tending, and of Old Susie who was lost somewhere near Horsefoot. Only she thought it best not to tell him why Old Susie was lost. And James Christopher was gratifyingly interested in it all. He was so interested that his ears wagged a trifle. He was so interested he couldn’t even let on that he wasn’t.

“And I think that I like it there,” said she, “only nobody ever comes.”

“Well, I shouldn’t care,” he said stoutly. “Not I.”

“You mean you wouldn’t care?” she repeated incredulously.

“Not a bit,” answered Jumbles. “I’d make them come, I would. They’d come to my farm because it would be the finest farm in the county, with the finest horses, and the finest cows. I’d make them.”

“Oh, you live on a farm, too!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth happily.

“No, I don’t,” he said. “That’s just the trouble. I work in a city called Pleasant Acres.”

“That’s a pretty name,” she declared. “It’s a country kind of name. I’m sure it must be nice there.”

“Well, it isn’t,” he grumbled. “It’s all factories and smoke, and dingy little houses with no grass in front of them. And I hate my work.”

“What work?”

“Well, you see,” confessed Jumbles, “I work in a factory where they make farm machinery, and I have to stencil the addresses on the packing

cases and crates. And they go to Berryville, and to Hobbs Center, and to Cottonwood Lane, and to lots of such places. All with country names. They go to places where there are farms, those crates do. Some day I'm going to tell Mr. Hefflefinger—that's the foreman—to take his old job, and I'm going to walk and walk until I come to a farm."

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"You mightn't—" She was going to say that he might not like it, but he anticipated.

"Yes, I would," he said stubbornly. "I would, too, like it."

"Oh, look!" urged Lisbeth.

At the roadside stood a pedestal of granite, and from it rose a broad column of bright stone, richly veined—as if it were quartz that yet retained its treasures. Tall ferns flanked it, with little ferns beneath, and with the brown crosiers of young ferns thrusting through the moist loam. The base of the pedestal was worn by the tread of many feet, and from a niche in the lifted rock a jet of clearest water sang and shimmered. A flight of small birds, drinking, stared at them boldly, nor made as if to take wing.

"It's only an old drinking fountain," said Jumbles. "We've two in Pleasant Acres. But they don't work. Not often."

"Just the same," objected Lisbeth, "it is a very pretty drinking fountain. I'm thirsty. I'm so thirsty."

"So am I," said Jumbles.

The birds moved only a little way aside that the boy and girl might drink. The water was zestful with coolness. They bent to drink again. The water mirrored their faces, reddened and laughing. As they lifted their lips from it they perceived a small bronze tablet set within the stone above the jet. And the words that were scored deep in the bronze were these:

Here were sunshine and the slanting rain,
a thousand years ago.
All else is changed.
Dear changeless seasons—we, who have so little
while to stay,
Entreat you now to loiter.

They read it thrice, and were much puzzled as they

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read. So strange a message for a fountain wherefrom birds and travelers would quench their thirsts. Jumbles shook his head as to dismiss the problem.

“I guess it doesn’t mean anything,” he decided. “Come on, Lisbeth.”

“No, Jumbles,” said the girl. “It must mean something. It makes my throat hurt.”

“That’s because the water is so cold,” said the boy wisely.

“No, I’m sure it isn’t that. It means we ought to drink again, I think. Let’s, Jumbles.”

“Well—” he agreed.

They bent to drink again.

As they turned from the queer fountain, Jumbles gave a smothered shout and snatched up a pebble.

“A rabbit!” he whispered, and his arm drew back.

Mary Elizabeth clutched at the arm, nor would be shaken off. And all the while the rabbit sat just across the highway and regarded them solemnly. It had a clover blossom in its mouth.

“You mustn’t, Jumbles!” said the girl.

“Fiddlesticks” he exclaimed. “Where we going to get supper, I’d like to know?”

“Please, Jumbles,” she pleaded, still clinging to his arm.

“That’s what you get for going any place with a girl,” said the boy, but he let fall the pebble.

Of course, as you may have surmised, it was the self-same rabbit the Dark Woman had cuddled. Mary Elizabeth just knew that it was. It did not hop so much as an inch as they walked past it, but began again to munch the clover blossom. And Mary Elizabeth was quite certain that it closed one eye at her.



CHAPTER III.

Telling how Lisbeth and Jumbles entered a most dolorous canyon.—And found therein a very ominous sign-board.— Of their uncertainty and foreboding as they discussed dragons.—How the youth in apple-green came down the cliff to aid them.— Mentioning as well the encounter with the dragon, and what thereafter happened.— And the gift of a sword.

SO LISBETH and Jumbles went down the highway and wondered greatly whither it might lead, and really cared not at all. The day, which was yet in the forenoon, was bright with butterflies, and agreeably scented with many flowers. The forest thinned here and there to sunny glades, and in these meadowlands stood deer that were without fright, looking with soft and beautiful eyes upon the travelers. There were ponds and streams in which were fishes of swift silver, that must surely have been trouts, and now and again certain of these would rise flashingly into the day, and curve sweetly as a song, and take the water as a blade is sheathed. And doves were calling. Clearly. Fondly. Sadly. Wild doves were calling.

But after a time the forest grew sparse, the trees occasional, and beside the highway rested a disarray of giant fragments of stone. Shadow fell upon the wayfarers and there was a chill, tarn-like breeze in their faces. Mary Elizabeth had said that she was beginning to be the least bit hungry, and Jumbles had declared that his was the appetite of a wolf. He had vowed that he could and would eat anything, positively anything. And they looked about for small fruits or berries, finding all the trees to be dwarfed and

fruitless, and all the shrubs to be squat and barren. They were aware, and with astonishment, that the tumbled fragments had given way to towering cliffs of most forbidding aspect, and that the shadow was the shadow of these, and the forbidding breeze was the breath of the narrow, prisoned canyon the cliffs formed. The cliffs were splotched with a wildness of grim color. They rose up and up to a far heaven, making crooked, cruel borders for a wistful river of sky. And in this river swam, and balanced, and poised and fled, and swooped and returned, monstrous birds of sable, with shreds of sky between their outspread pinions.

“They are vultures!” breathed Jumbles, and he thought of a picture in his geography.

“They’re not,” protested Lisbeth. “They’re just only turkey buzzards.”

Nevertheless, though often she had seen them circling Horsefoot, or hovering with tireless wing the lost meadows of home, she tingled with a nameless, cold foreboding. And when one of the sooty monsters spiraled down to perch upon a nearby crag, swaying and out-thrusting its livid head, while it scrutinized the travelers, it must be confessed that Mary Elizabeth shivered. But Jumbles stooped for a stone, and this time she did not hinder him. The bird rose clumsily,

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uncouthly, into the air as the pebble whirled past it, but when fairly a-wing it became again a creature of consummate though evil grace, tracing fluent patterns on the river of sky.

“Isn’t it funny?” said Mary Elizabeth, and not as one who asks a question. “They aren’t the least bit harmful, and they do a great deal of good, but every time I see a turkey buzzard—”

“You mean a vulture,” suggested Jumbles.

“Every time I see a turkey buzzard,” continued the girl, “it makes me feel queer all over. They seem always to be watching you. It’s different with hawks. They’re cruel, but they’re beautiful, too. And they’re so clean and handsome. Now if I were a bird—”

“If you were a bird, I guess I know what you’d be,” laughed Jumbles.

“Well?”

“You’d be a partridge, that’s what—all kind of brown and ready to run away. You’d be a partridge, with heaps of autumn leaves to hide in.”

“I would not!”

“Yes, you would!”

But they simply couldn't bicker about it, though it had helped them to forget the shadowy chillness of the canyon, and the great, soaring birds, and all that, because each perceived for the first time—and their gasps were as one—a towering signboard which crowned a wine-hued rock, and which bore this most forbidding legend:

BEWARE OF THE DRAGON!
HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT
LIFE INSURANCE?
TRY THE STEAMFITTERS' MUTUAL
TRESPASSERS TAKE NOTICE!

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The lettering was of scarlet and purple, and to the right-hand corner of the signboard was affixed a tremendous scarlet seal, which displayed the scaliest of dragons swallowing his own tail. They approached the boarding with a pretense of amused diversion, to stand staring up at it. But first Lisbeth, and then Jumbles, glanced furtively down the highway.

"It hasn't been up there long," Lisbeth decided.

"Oh, how can you tell?" scoffed Jumbles.

"Well if it had been there any time at all," answered the girl, "the town folks would have shot it full of holes, like they do our mail box."

"Don't you suppose it's just an old advertisement?" asked Jumbles.

"N-o-o," said Mary Elizabeth reflectively. "It might mean exactly what it says. There's something about a dragon that would make you think of life insurance, I should imagine."

"Dragons, shucks!" exclaimed Jumbles, casting another glance down the highway. "There aren't dragons any more. I tell you I wish I had my Flobert here."

"What's a Flobert?"

"It's a rifle, silly. I bet you I could ping that white spot on the rock up there."

"Well, I'll bet you this much, Jumbles. I'll bet you haven't got your old Flobert anyway. So I guess we might as well turn back."

"Turn back, nothing!" protested the boy. "Isn't there some way around?"

But there wasn't. The splotched and mottled cliffs thrust sharply upward on either hand. The highway swept smoothly on to a bend in the canyon.

Beyond that? They could only guess. And what decision they might have reached, one cannot say, yet one imagines that Jumbles would presently have trudged forward,

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wishing all the while for his Flobert, which was back in Pleasant Acres on two shingle nails above his bed. However, this decision was spared them, for a voice rang happily, clearly, from the heights, bright as noon-day in June, buoyant as bugles.

“Hello, down there!” called the voice. “Wait a jiffy, won’t you?”

It was such a friendly sort of voice. The two travelers held their faces toward the call, with their necks cricking, and over the rim of the canyon, the remote and rugged edge of it, they saw a glint of greenest green and the small oval of a face.

“Yoo-hoooo!” called the voice. “I’m coming, Mary Elizabeth! Coming, Jumbles!”

There was a gleam on the height as of emeralds shattered in the sun, and a liteness of green flashed downward.

“Oh!” gasped Mary Elizabeth. “Oh! He’s falling!”

But no. From the crest to a cruel fang of saffron. From the fang, hand over hand, twisting, leaping, shimmering, to a purple shelf, narrow as death. And instantly over the shelf, green against violet, to drop recklessly but surely to the flank of a black crag, to circle it, to slip smoothly downward again, to leap leanly outward, to bound, to spring aside, to be miraculously balanced on the very top of the sign-board itself, and thence to curve lightly into the highway beside them. It seemed incredible, and of course it was.

He was dressed all in apple-green, doublet to shoon, with a cap of green velvet perched aslant his dark head, with a green feather in the cap, and a green scabbard at his slim thigh, and the winking green pommel of a sword. He couldn’t have been much older than Jumbles. His somewhat pointed ears were set close to the short dark curls. The oval of his face was perfect and beardless,

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richly olive, and his mouth was of generous, merry curve. One could not have vouched for the hue of his eyes, since they seemed now to be dark as a warm midnight, and again to be hazel, or brown as pools in August, or

blue as the sea's self, or gray as cloud. They were, however, in any of these shifting hues, alight with a restless, roving merriment, and his look swept hither and thither as swallows fly. He wasn't even breathing hard, for all that he had descended the cliff so expeditiously.

"What's here?" he asked, his look dancing from the travelers to the signboard and back again.

They told him, of course, because he was that sort of person to whom one has to tell things, and is glad to tell, and when his mirth rang round them they didn't care in the least, because—well, because it was that sort of mirth.

And they were aware, too, of a faintness of music, as though fifes, and violins, and flutes, and mouth-organs, were very happy somewhere. The stripling in apple-green wasn't making the music, of this they were certain—and yet it had seemed to come with him, for they hadn't heard it before. It threaded the shadowy canyon with spun gold, and his mirth flooded the canyon with brightness as never the sun might flood it, and Lisbeth found herself with not a dread in the world, and Jumbles no longer wished for his Flobert.

"Oh, it's the dragon, is it?" he said, when they had explained their problem to him. "Of course, there's a dragon. There's always a dragon. And I like to go about looking for them. Let's!"

He threw back his head with a gesture inimitably graceful and laughed and laughed. The cliffs laughed to hear him, and all the circling vultures dwindled in blue distance. Now there were three going down the

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highway together, footing it blithely over the cobbles, Lisbeth, and Jumbles, and the youth in apple-green. He laughed at the least and littlest things. He laughed at them. He laughed at himself. He drew the sword from its scabbard flashingly, and cast it high into air, and laughed to see it twirl and twinkle. He snatched the gemmed pommel from the sunshine, laughing at his own sureness. The blade sped smoothly into its scabbard. And he laughed to draw near to that darkling bend of the canyon.

"Ho, dragon!" he cried. "As God lives, here be three of us!"

As at the word, there came to their ears a most dismal and ominous rumbling, and clanking, and grinding, and gnashing, and clattering, and clinking, and a scent like to sulphur on a hot stove griddle. Trickling around the turn a wisp of yellow smoke crept low to the cobbles, wearily,

sluggishly. Lisbeth and Jumbles would have slackened the pace, for it seemed then to them that there was no urgency, but the apple-green stripling strode more briskly than ever, and his green shoon fairly sped over the cobbles. They could do naught save follow at his hastening heels. And, rounding the bend in this wise, they came suddenly upon the vast creature itself—the horrid weavings of its seven-fanged head, the interminable scaled length of it.

It was a very presentable dragon. Lisbeth grew faint at heart to perceive the wideness and the redness of its yawn, while Jumbles hastily broke a cudgel from a gnarled tree, and trembled inwardly to think of the utter invincibility of such a creature. Each clutched at the sleeve of their companion, whereat he turned upon them a face radiant with unfeigned joyousness. His fingers played with the sword hilt, and his voice was brightly broken with mirth.

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“Why, Lisbeth!” he chided. “Why, Jumbles!”

And all the while this dragon came squatting, rumbling toward them, with quite terrible tossings of its seven-fanged head, and inexpressibly alarming writhings, and twitchings, and snortings. Flame issued from its cavernous eye-sockets, and viscid, stifling vapors from its gaping nostrils.

“What’s the matter with you?” the apple-green stripling asked his companions. “I think it’s by far the funniest dragon I’ve ever seen.”

“I’m sure I don’t see anything funny,” replied Lisbeth.

“There isn’t anything funny about it,” added Jumbles loyally.

But the youth in apple-green gave a flirt to his head that was gay to behold, and whisked forth his sword again, and struggled weakly against his merriment.

“There’s only one way to deal with a dragon!” he cried. “St. George! Come on, Jumbles!”

Those two ran forward, the one with bared sword, the other with wavering cudgel—straight at that seven-fanged head they ran, to that red grotto of ravening throat, to those dread eyes of flame. The monstrous beast reared upward so to meet them, and voiced a bellowing that roared, and thundered, and echoed through the narrow gorge. And as one man they smote the creature, ringingly—the slim blade to the red and slaving throat, the cudgel to the flat reptilian brow. A most extraordinary result was observed on the instant.

Down sank the tremendous and formidable horror. Its bowed, stout legs trembled pitifully. The fiery glow faded from its eyes. A last wisp of sulphurous smoke rose from its flared nostrils, thinned, eddied, and was gone. A convulsion as of dire extremity ran shudderingly down its gross paunch and scaled vastness. The

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distant tail lashed feebly and was still. The seven-fanged jaws clashed thrice, and closed forever. And all inert, and innocent in death, the dragon slept upon the cobblestones.

As for Jumbles, he scarce could believe it. But as for Lisbeth she had, in her innermost heart, surely foreseen that the dragon was as good as done for when Jumbles ran forward. And as for the apple-green stripling, he had leaped to the neck of the dragon and was poised there, his eyes alight with gayety, his throat bubbling with mirth. He caught the tip of his blade with the left hand and bent it to a shining arc above the green feather. Jumbles leaned upon his cudgel and frowned darkly. You see, it was his first dragon.

“So have I served all dragons since Time himself was young!” cried the youth in apple-green.

On this, a section of the dragon’s midriff slid smoothly upward, and a head with horn-rimmed spectacles was thrust forth. Almost before they had an instant in which to be astonished, the proprietor of the head followed, and was standing there beside the dragon. He was a smallish man of scholarly appearance, rather primly and impeccably attired, even to pearl-gray spats, and he peered sadly at them from behind thick, glistening lenses.

“Now you’ve done it,” he said, wagging his head dolefully.

“Done what?” they chorused.

“You’ve busted the carburetor, of course,” he answered. “I’d just got it fixed.”

“We weren’t thinking about carburetors when that old dragon of yours came at us,” said Jumbles stoutly.

“Yes, how were we to know you were inside of him?” asked Mary Elizabeth.

The apple-green stripling was doubled over with

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"Now you've done it"

merriment. He straightened, threw up his hands with open palms, and tearfully entreated the sky. And all around them was that faintness of music, as though fifes, and violins, and flutes, and mouth-organs were very happy somewhere.

"It was in all the papers," retorted the little man, with some asperity. "And mine was the first transcontinental hop ever undertaken by a dragon. My goodness, yes. It was in all the papers. I'm sure I don't know what I'll do now."

"I wish there were some way we could help you," said Lisbeth remorsefully.

“But you can’t. And, anyway, you haven’t heard the half of my troubles. The fact is I am on a very responsible mission of state.”

“Not really?”

“Yes, really. I am the bearer of an urgent message from His Excellency, the Mayor of Small Duck, Maine, to His Excellency, The Mayor of Skookum Slough, Washington. And besides that, I’ll probably pick up quite a bit of mail—from other mayors, you know—along the route. One always does. But what’s to become of my mission if I can’t get the dragon started again?”

They had no suggestions to offer, though they thought and thought about his problem. A quite natural curiosity began to plague Mary Elizabeth.

“I don’t suppose anybody but the two mayors ever will know what the message says,” she ventured.

“Oh, yes, they shall! It will be given to the world at the proper time, never fear. In a general way I myself am already aware of the nature of the document.”

“But you are not to tell, I imagine.”

“Why not? I may say that great confidence has been reposed in my discretion. I could tell if I wanted to.”

“Oh, I do hope you will!”

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The master of the transcontinental dragon visibly expanded with importance and dignity, while he beamed pleasantly at his questioner.

“Well,” said he, “this is about what it says. It says that the progressive, peppy and prosperous seaport of Small Duck, Maine, advertised in all the leading magazines as Queen City of the Clam Brisket Industry, sends greetings and best wishes to the prosperous, peppy and progressive city of Skookum Slough, Washington, well and favorably known as the Huckleberry Hub of the West. And it says that two such splendidly representative and leading communities must continue to put their shoulders to the wheel for bigger and better markets, and for the advancement of science. Most respectfully.”

“My gracious!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth. “Is that all?”

The bearer of the message stiffened at the tone. He was visibly offended.

“I don’t know what more you could expect,” he said severely. “There is a postscript, however.”

“How nice! I think postscripts are always the best part of letters. Won’t you tell us what it is?”

“I’m not sure that I should,” began the little man, dubiously. “Perhaps I shouldn’t. And yet it would probably be all right. For I cannot make head nor tail of it myself, and so it must be in code. And since it’s in code there’s no harm done.”

“Well?”

“This is what the postscript says, exactly,” responded the dragon’s master. “It says ‘Dear Bill, how’s fishing?’”

He was pacing to and fro again beside the dragon’s solemn jowls, wagging his head in dolor. Presently he paused, reflected, and brightened visibly.

“Has anybody got a screwdriver?” he asked.

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But none of them had a screwdriver. And it seemed a hairpin wouldn’t help. They had told him, of course, that they were sorry—even the youth in apple-green expressed contrition—but really there was nothing they could do about it. And they went down the highway again, until at last the sprawled carcass of the dragon was lost to view, with the little man standing forlornly beside it. They came merrily out of the canyon, and into the sunshine of mid-afternoon, with trees, and flowers, and birds at every hand. Here the apple-green stripling halted and bade his companions farewell.

“Remember me to Mr. Gaffney,” he requested.

“Who is Mr. Gaffney?” they asked.

“You’ll see,” he laughed. “I think I’ll turn back now and lend a hand to that poor chap with the dragon. I’ve tinkered quite as many dragons as I’ve broken. I’m handy with tools. And a transcontinental dragon ought really to be encouraged.”

He considered them, smiling at the long, long faces of his friends.

“Take my sword,” he said to Jumbles. “You may have need of it.”

“But, no—”

“But, yes!” smiled their comrade, and he buckled the belt around the boy’s waist. The green scabbard rested against the soiled denim, and the gemmed pommel twinkled at Jumbles’ left thigh.

“Oh, come with us, please!” urged Mary Elizabeth.

“I will come whenever you call to me,” he promised.

“But we don’t even know your name,” said Jumbles. “Tell us your name, so we shall think of it often.”

Then a silence descended on the forest and the highway, and they could hear their hearts beating. He stood there musingly, and without smiling. The curve of his lips became a childish wistfulness, and his roving glance

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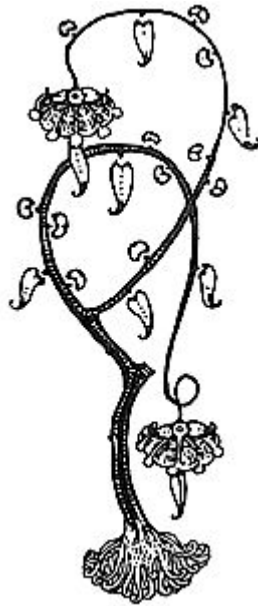
was stilled to an inward look. His hands to his hips, the velvet cap aslant, its green feather jaunty, and the greenness of his habit against the greenness of the forest. Then he tossed his shoulders lightly, and his mirth rang joyous through the woodland.

“Why, as to that—” he said.

“Yes, tell us your name,” they besought him.

“I am called Laughter!”

And only the greenness of the green forest was before them, where their friend had stood. They looked at each other wonderingly, and were grieved to think that he had gone away. But the sword pressed in friendly fashion against the boy’s thigh. And soon they were happy again.



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CHAPTER IV.

Being the exact account of an iron cage beside the highway and the adventure thereof.—

How our travelers met the Wild Man of Borneo and held speech with him.—Of the tale he had to relate.—And of their exceeding hunger while he spoke of Art and of Love.—Telling also of a voice that called to dinner.



'M getting hungrier and hungrier," said Mary Elizabeth as they walked along.

"Somehow I'm not so hungry as I was," replied Jumbles. He was drawing the sword half-way from its scabbard, thrusting it down again, and admiring the emeralds that winked on the pommel.

"Boys can stand anything better than girls, I guess," he added. "Take explorers, for instance. They're always hungry, so hungry they've got to eat their shoes, or lizards, or dog biscuit, or something like that. But you never hear them complain about it. Maybe you're sorry now that you wouldn't let me peg one at that rabbit. We could make a fire anywhere here, and broil a rabbit. Only we haven't any rabbit. Oh, well."

"I'm not either sorry!" denied Lisbeth. "And I'm thankful I'm not that hungry."

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"Perhaps this Mr. Gaffney will have something to eat," he ventured hopefully.

"Sandwiches!"

"With ham!"

"With chicken-breast and lettuce!"

"With lemonade!"

“With raspberry shrub!”

“Perhaps.”

“But we don’t know where Mr. Gaffney lives,” said Elizabeth sadly. “He may live a thousand miles from here.”

“He might not,” replied Jumbles stoutly. “He might be living anywhere along here.”

They plodded onward, but they were becoming the least little bit tired. Jumbles made very serious wrinkles in his forehead. Then he stopped walking.

“See here, Lisbeth,” he said. “I’ve been fooling you all the time.”

And he fished from one of his pockets a flattened lump of tin-foil, which, on being carefully unfolded, revealed the half of a very messy chocolate bar. He thrust the offering into her hand.

“Oh, James Christopher!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth. It was the first time she had called him by this name. “I couldn’t think of it. You eat it.”

“Shan’t!” insisted Jumbles. “Anyway, I’ve eaten mine. That’s why I’m not hungry as you. Go ahead, Lisbeth.”

Mary Elizabeth looked long at him, and his brown face flushed at the scrutiny. She saw the gallant falsehood in his eyes, and she remarked, too, that he furtively regarded the pitiful confection with something akin to longing.

“Where did you eat yours, James Christopher?” she demanded sternly.

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“Oh, back a ways.”

“I’ll tell you,” proposed Lisbeth. “Let’s go halvers. Because I’m not nearly so hungry as I was.”

And this was wonderfully true. With some difficulty, since the chocolate slithered and slipped so, and came off on her fingers, she broke the remnant of the bar in twain, and they went on once more. Mary Elizabeth nibbled at her portion a long while, but Jumbles was licking his fingers in no time at all.

“That ought to keep us going until we find Mr. Gaffney,” said the boy, and he began to whistle.

“What in the world can that noise be?” asked Lisbeth.

She didn’t mean his whistling. She meant a noise that came to them up the highway. And a very great deal of noise it was, too. It was like cats in conflict, and lions roaring over their kill, and dogs barking at the moon, and

madmen pent in by stone and steel. A most frightful and horrendous tumult, accompanied by rattlings and clankings as of iron.

“I think it must be a foundry of some kind,” suggested Jumbles, but his fist was white on the sword hilt.

When they came to the source of the noise, as they soon did, though haltingly, they found it to be a most singular individual, prisoned in a roomy iron cage at one side of the highway. Flanking the cage were dusty canvasses depicting: 1.—A frightfully feral and ferocious wild man in the act of rending a tropical buffalo limb from limb. 2.—An equally fearsome and feral wild man turning upon seven glistening blacks, armed with spears, while he twirled a white man, in linen suit and pith helmet, casually round his head. Above the gilt scroll that topped the cage was yet another canvas, bearing these words:

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THE ONLY AND ORIGINAL
WILD MAN OF BORNEO
CAPTURED IN HIS NATIVE JUNGLE
AT GREAT COST OF LIFE
BY THE PROFESSOR DINWIDDIE EXPEDITION
DO NOT POKE, FEED NOR MOLEST!

Within the cage, of course, was the Wild Man of Borneo himself. And he was fairly gibbering with rage, actually hopping with it, while from time to time he made the forest hideous with his howlings and screamings. It was enough to chill the most intrepid blood. In his huge hands, all hairy and horrible, he would lift high the shackles which claimed him, and bring them clashing to the sawdust of the floor. Anon he would bound to the bars, and clutch them powerfully while he rattled the entire structure with his impotent but frightful efforts to be out and at the travelers. Beneath his matted hair the quite untameable eyes of him shone dreadfully from reddened lids. At the thick corded throat dangled a necklace of bear's claws and glistening white teeth. His cavernous mouth bore tushes at either corner, curved tushes of yellow ivory. And about his middle was a short kilt of stiff brown grasses. So much of hair and horror, of sheer rage and murderous ravening, neither Lisbeth nor Jumbles ever had beheld.

“I wonder can he get out,” said Mary Elizabeth.

“No, I don’t think he can,” replied Jumbles dubiously. “But don’t you go too close, Lisbeth.”

“Oh, I shan’t,” promised the girl.

The Wild Man of Borneo had ceased his more strident outcries, and was crouched in a corner of the cage, mumbling and growling over an enormous thigh-bone, which now and again he regarded critically ere he resumed his dreadful repast. But on the slightest movement

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of the travelers, he would relinquish the bone and in a single bound would be at the bars again, his shackles clinking, the whole cage vibrant with his fury.

“If we only had some peanuts,” said Mary Elizabeth.

“Peanuts, your grandmother!” scoffed the boy. “Wild men don’t eat peanuts. They eat bones and things.”

The Wild Man had again ceased to rattle the bars, and was merely clinging there, his shaggy head atilt, as though he listened attentively. And something most singularly like an awakened hope stirred in his baleful eyes. Consider the amazement of the travelers to hear him sigh gustily. Thereafter he was silent, save for an occasional gentle tinkling of his fetters, and his head was bent in stupid musing.

“Maybe he is wishing he was home in Borneo,” said Lisbeth softly. She saw the farm at Back of Beyond, and the mirrored beauty of drowsing Horsefoot. “Poor old Wild Man.”

“Let’s walk around the cage,” proposed the boy.

So they began to walk around the cage, but no sooner had they done so than they halted most abruptly and stood frozen with horror. For there wasn’t any back at all to the cage. There wasn’t so much as a single bar. The cage was just a front and two sides. And there was the Wild Man, fetterless, perched on the very rim of the floor, looking out at them, and quite evidently preparing to descend.

“Run, Lisbeth!” shouted Jumbles. “Oh, run! Please!”

White faced and slender he stood there, between the girl and the shaggy horror, with the slender sword drawn and whistling. He had clenched his teeth in his lip. He was taut as a bow string.

“Run, Lisbeth!”

“I can’t, Jumbles! I can’t!”

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The Wild Man of Borneo swung lightly to the ground. But he did not leap to the attack. He seemed rather astonished.

“What would she want to run for?” he asked rumblingly.

The voice of the Wild Man came from his broad, hairy chest, and it was deep and rich and wonderful as organ-tones. The voice wasn’t wild in the least. It was, in all truth, just the opposite of wild. It was benevolent and kindly.

“I repeat,” said the Wild Man, “why should she wish to run?”

“Well, we didn’t know,” answered Jumbles. “You see, mister, there wasn’t any way of telling that you didn’t mean it.”

“Ah, yes,” agreed the Wild Man, with evident gratification. “I see your point of view, and I thank you one and all for your kind attention. I am, despite these sylvan surroundings in Which you discover me, still the great artist.”

“We were only looking for Mr. Gaffney,” said Lisbeth nervously. “And we didn’t ever mean to disturb you.”

The mouth of the Wild Man widened ear to ear, and with a great spatulate forefinger he rubbed his nose amusedly.

“I am Mr. Gaffney,” he told them. “Didn’t one of you say something about peanuts?”

“Yes, but we haven’t any,” answered Lisbeth.

“I haven’t had a good peanut in years and years,” he sighed, and removed his tushes. Then he seemed quite like anybody else. Almost. Save for his excessive hairiness, and the savage necklace, and the grass kilt.

“We were wishing we had some peanuts for you,” explained Jumbles. “But perhaps we were really wishing



"We grow 'pickles and turnips for market"

for some for ourselves. We've only had half a chocolate bar since morning."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Wild Man sympathetically. He cupped his hands about his mouth, and turned toward a lane in the forest.

"My own!" he shouted deeply. "Precious!"

"Yes, Horace!" The answer issued from the leafy lane, and it was silvery as bells.

"Put—supper—on—right—away—won't you?" he called. "We've—guests!"

"Yes, Horace!"

Lisbeth and Jumbles looked happily at one another. Now if they could only wait in patience, and politely. If only they could manage not to fidget nor to faint.

“Do you—er—work at anything else?” the girl asked the Wild Man.

“Than being a wild man, you mean?” he returned, with a lift of tufted eyebrows.

“Why, yes.”

They had seated themselves on a fallen tree trunk, far gone in decay and softly cushioned with mosses. Mr. Gaffney appeared pleased at the question and settled himself anew, in the manner of one who is about to begin to talk for some time. He cleared his throat with a resonant, cathedral-like “A-hem!”

“Certainly,” he responded. “We grow pickles and turnips for market, on the finest eighty you’ll find anywhere. Being a wild man is merely my recreation. It serves to keep me in touch with my art. It insures that I shall not rust—shall not become the yokel, the stolid countryman. Now, I think I should tell you—”

But Jumbles, with shining eyes, at the bare mention of vegetables grown for market, had interrupted Mr. Gaffney.

“Pickles and turnips!” he repeated, as though he

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were speaking of pieces-of-eight. “What fertilizers do you use, Mr. Gaffney? And where do you market your garden stuff?”

Mr. Gaffney seemed slightly, passingly, annoyed.

“The best fertilizer I’ve ever found,” he said, “is the sweat of the face. It is a rich soil hereabouts, though. Our market is the Country of Cockaigne. We’ve almost a monopoly on the pickle and turnip trade in those parts. Now as I was saying—” And he sighed happily as he settled himself once more. They knew what was coming, and tried their best not to think of dinner.

“As I was saying,” continued Mr. Gaffney, “I think I should tell you something about myself. My name is Horace Napoleon Gaffney, and I was born of respectable, well-thought-of parents in the metropolis of Oskosh. Father was the most successful paperhanger in that city, and he held at one time, I believe, the international championship for spreading a standard pail of paste on a ceiling. On a ceiling, you comprehend. Yes, my dear old father was, in his way, also an artist.

“In my early boyhood it was decided that I should be a great editor, and with this purpose in view my father procured for me the post of carrier for an influential publication, the Oskosh Morning Alert. It was the first rung of my fancied career. My education in journalism had begun. And yet somehow I felt, with boyish intuition, a persistent hunger for another lifework. Not that I wouldn’t have been a great editor. Not that. I haven’t the slightest doubt of it. I was frequently complimented for my fidelity and craftsmanship in the delivery of papers. I hurled them with accuracy, so that they fell precisely outside the front door, never striking the screen and thus awakening the household. It was not necessary for the subscriber to creep coyly forth in his nightshirt, in the revealing radiance of the morn.

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All that he needed to do was to thrust one arm through the crack of the door, and there was his Oskosh Morning Alert. In his very hand, I tell you. Yes, I should have made a great editor. Already, and with warrant, I considered myself to be an accomplished newspaperman, a journalist, a colleague of the Fourth Estate.

“But Fate had other and nobler employment in store for me. I say that Fate perceived in my boyish spirit the true afflatus of the artist, of the great artist. And when the editor of the Alert—his name, by the by, was Alonzo T. Smithers—recognized my journalistic genius by bestowing on me a ticket to the circus, all unwittingly he was the instrument of my higher destiny. I well recall his identical words.

“‘Pray accept this ticket to the circus, my lad, good only for Saturday afternoon,’ said Alonzo T. Smithers. ‘The ghost will not walk tonight.’ And he turned gloomily away.”

“What did the editor mean when he said the ghost wouldn’t walk?” asked Jumbles. “Was there a ghost in Oskosh then?”

“There was a ghost which walked occasionally. But only occasionally. I may say, for your information, that the term is a mere dramaticism, borrowed from the stage and implying at least a temporary financial stringency. Alonzo T. Smithers intended me to understand that my week’s salary would be in arrears for some days.”

“Oh!” said the travelers.

“How well do I remember that auspicious Saturday afternoon,” resumed Mr. Gaffney. “I had thrown baseballs at the tar-baby, and to such purpose that, though I had expended no more than a few silver coins, I carried in my

pocket seven genuine Havana perfectos, only three of which were at all fractured. I had visited the main tent and observed with delight the death-defying

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exhibitions of the acrobats, the high-divers, the tight-rope walkers. I thought, too, that the Japanese jugglers were exceptionally good. The clowns, though well enough in their way, I had no fancy for. I incline to the serious and have little time for buffoonery. The menagerie also was adequate. But it was to the sideshow that I was drawn as the needle to Polaris. My destiny nudged me, I am confident, ever to the sideshow.

“Alas, that I should then reflect I had no ticket to the sideshow, which was an independent enterprise, and that the dime which might have admitted me had been improvidently expended for pink lemonade. Picture, if you can, my distress and despair, as I stood—a mere lad, and penniless—outside the charmed portal. The barker was urging each and everyone to walk right up, with a dime, the tenth part of a dollar, but the plea was not for Horace Napoleon Gaffney. It was in that moment, I think, I first tasted the essential bitterness of life. But fortune was taking thought of me, even while I despaired.

“Do you believe he will do, Pete?” asked someone close beside me. I then observed two gentlemen, evidently of the profession, to be viewing me closely.

“Will he do?” exclaimed the gentleman to whom the question had been put. ‘I tell you Hank, he’s got the other one looking like thirty cents, just as he is!’

“With a few words about a dollar for my trouble, they seized me by the elbows and propelled me, dazed beyond resistance, through the crowd and into the tent. And in a trice, I assure you, they had divested me of my garments, stained me with walnut juice, rubbed dust in my hair, clapped tushes in my mouth, and tossed me into a grass skirt. The entire proceeding smacked strongly of abduction. Even then I did not realize the lofty purpose of my good and guardian angel. I became somewhat

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affrighted. I struck out at them. I screamed and struggled. But to no avail.

“Will he do, you asked?” said the professional known as Pete. ‘If we can only gentle him down a bit he’ll be the best wild man that ever came

out of Borneo.’

“Gradually they persuaded me to lend an ear. I learned that the artist who until that day had enacted the Wild Man of Borneo, had deserted his high calling for a more lucrative position with the Fashion Livery Stables. The two gentlemen entreated me to essay the role, if only for the evening performance. They instructed me in the mere rudiments of clanking and rattling, expressed themselves as already well content with my vocal talents, and—in fine—I yielded to their pleas. Thus in time I became the greatest of all the Wild Men of Borneo, and assumed as of right the title of Only and Original. The considerable loss to journalism was to the happy advantage of art.”

Mr. Gaffney paused and beamed proudly on his guests. It was all very interesting, but they were secretly wishing the same wish. It was this—that the silvern voice would call again down the lane, and soon, bidding them come to supper.

“Anyway, it must be an awfully good supper, Jumbles,” whispered the girl. “She’s taking such a dreadfully long time.”

“What was that?” inquired Mr. Gaffney.

“I was only telling Jumbles that you must have studied an awfully long time to be as good a wild man as you are,” said Lisbeth. She felt, virtuously, that the reply had really been tactful, and not at all wicked.

“I guess I misunderstood you,” said Mr. Gaffney. “My hearing isn’t what it used to be. Yes, I studied a long time, indeed, although I was better than most of

them from the very beginning. My parents, as chance would have it, attended the evening performance at which I made my debut. I cannot blame them even now for their emotional reaction when, on pausing before the Wild Man’s cage, they discovered the artist to be none other than their own dear son. Though they scarce could believe their eyes, my discomfiture at beholding them served to betray me, and father bade me come forth at once and put, as he said, my pants on. But my mother insisted that there was no need of this until she had attended to me. Indeed, she declared that she preferred to reason with me as I was. People were thronging round the cage, for my parents were nothing if not vociferous, when Zubelda, the Abyssinian snake charmer, saved the situation. Ah, the discretion and strategems of the sex! She cast her favorite python from her,

into the midst of the crowd. During the diversion so created I argued eloquently with mother and father—for at their insistence I had admitted them to my cage—and at length persuaded them to talk with my employers. My parents gave their reluctant consent to the new career, though father was still of the opinion that a paper-hanger's son ought to follow one of the literary pursuits. I may say I never permitted them to regret their action.

“Of course, during the next year or so, until I had perfected my technique, the studies were arduous. But I mastered the difficult phases of my art simultaneously. Howling, clanking, rattling and gnawing—I practiced all of these fundamentals far into the night, to the annoyance, I admit, of my companion artists, but to the exceeding benefit of art in general and of our profession in particular. I became, as I have said, the admitted superior of all other Wild Men of Borneo, fully entitled to the distinction of being billed as the Only and

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Original, and of being privileged, in recognition of my talents, to demand and receive beef bones that were not stale. My dear friends, to whatever tasks you may be called, remember that it is application, and yet more application, which counts. Of course, we cannot all be artists.”

“Oh, Horace!” the voice floated sweetly from the lane. “Supper!”

“Coming, my own!”

But as Lisbeth and Jumbles sprang eagerly to their feet, the Wild Man upheld a restraining hand.

“Just a moment,” he said. “They always call supper before it is quite ready. Let’s see—”

“Yes,” he resumed, as his guests sank heavily to the log again, “I was foremost among the great artists that specialize in such presentations. And, indeed, I might even now—for I am yet in my prime—be bringing romance and education to the millions, had not Zuzu the Beautiful Albino joined our companionship. That radiant creature! That incomparable representative of her sex! As she glided to her dais for the opening performance, and began arranging the charming photographs of herself, which she would later purvey to the patronage, my heart sprang out to her. I was at once stricken motionless and dumb.

“‘Rattle those chains a bit, won’t you Horace?’ whispered Pete, who was near at hand. ‘The farmers are coming in.’

“With an effort I recalled myself to my art, and if I do say so as shouldn’t, my performance touched the more rarefied heights of genius. I fairly outshone myself, and my reward was a dazzling glance from those strange, those mystic, eyes! I cared not at all for the gaping of the crowds. Only for her glance. Only for her smile. So we became acquainted, and mine was presently

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the boon of calling her by the fond name of friend. But a serpent, I tell you, a wolf in sheep’s clothing, entered the Eden of our friendship. In Poughkeepsie, I think it was, the Living Skeleton began to tender her marked attentions. My woe was unutterable. I yearned to break him in kindlings, as we do bean poles. I would have called him to the field of honor, had not Pete advised me that it might be hurtful to the show business. And at length, when I taxed Zuzu with permitting the dastard to pay court to her, she confessed somewhat coldly that he, at least, had proffered his heart and hand. Ah, the torments I have endured! The wounds I have borne so bravely!”

Great stifled sobs now racked Mr. Gaffney, and he held his head in his palms. The eyes of Mary Elizabeth were starry with tears. She laid a hand gently upon the matted thatch of him. But Jumbles regarded the Wild Man somewhat disdainfully. And when he spoke it was almost with rudeness.

“What became of this Zuzu?” asked Jumbles.

Mr. Gaffney raised his head, to smile a slow, blissful smile. His eyes were shining.

“How fortunate it is for womankind,” remarked Mr. Gaffney, “that tender falsehood so becomes them.”

“Maybe,” replied Jumbles. “But what did become of Zuzu?”

“Why, I married her,” declared Mr. Gaffney with great good humor.

The voice called from the lane again, and the three of them walked toward it. It had been such a long and diversified day. There was a cock quail whistling in the thicket. And a mellow sound of cowbells.

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CHAPTER V.

Of the meeting with the woman whose eyes were as rubies.— And of the country supper that waited in the Gaffney cottage.—Touching also upon the lofty purpose and ambition of Plutarch.—And revealing the relative merits of certain turnips.—How Mrs. Gaffney and Lisbeth went to the spring at twilight.—And of that which the sibyl drew from the future.



NOW the lane thrust through the forest sweetly, and the lane was bordered with whitewashed stones. Beside and betwixt these grew lobelia flowers of an ineffable blueness. And toward the three as they went up the lane, walked slowly and with grace a tall and stately woman, full-bosomed, high of head, and wondrous to see. Her gown was of a blueness like unto the flowers, and her cheek was of a whiteness like unto the stones, save that the living pallor was warmed and tinted as by cream. Over each shoulder and to her girdle hung heavily a great plait of cream-hued hair, parted at the calm, broad brow to flow with silken shimmerings downward and rearward. But the eyes of the woman were more wonderful than all else, for they partook of the rich fire that is in rubies,

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and one could not fathom their rubescent glow. The woman smiled.

A fond tenderness, a pride beyond reckoning, lighted the swarthy countenance of Mr. Gaffney so to behold her, and presently, unmindful of his guests—who were gaping hugely—he had prisoned the whiteness of her hands within his own vast paws. Thus for a moment they stood smiling at one another, and pleasant it was to witness their delight in this meeting.

“Horace!” she chided him softly.

“Ah!” said Mr. Gaffney, relinquishing the hands. “Mrs. Gaffney, my own, our guests!”

They had proceeded no great distance when, the lane turning, they came to the white picket fence of the front yard, to the trim, creakless gate, and the threshold of the house itself. And Mary Elizabeth was certain as certain could be that nowhere, save in fairyland, or story books, or seed catalogs, was ever so dear a dwelling as that—so sentineled by the prim pinkness of hollyhocks, so cloistered with clambering roses of damask satin, so thoughtful with beds of purple pansies, so fragrant with the breath of banked sweetpeas. It was a house of brown shingles all over, with roof of green, and casement windows of many panes, and chimneys of white and red bricks. Coolness issued from the dim doorway, and sparkles of picture-glass. But there issued also a composite odor most delightfully distressing—being blent, as it was, of that which the kitchen held in waiting for them.

“Sandwiches!” scoffed Jumbles secretly in Lisbeth’s ear. She rebuked him with a glance.

“Step right in,” Mrs. Gaffney bade them. “You’re all hot and dusty, I suppose. You won’t mind washing in the kitchen? We always do. We’ve never really got around to the plumbing. But next year, perhaps.”

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They were standing in the cool semi-gloom of the parlor, captive to that momentary indecision which claims the stranger guest. Mr. Gaffney was no longer with them. Already from kitchenward sounded mighty splashings and splutterings, the squealing of a pump, a resonant “Ah-whoof!” Mary Elizabeth marked the crayon enlargement that would be the likeness of the gifted Oskosh paperhanger. Somehow the dimness of the parlor plucked him from his gilt frame and made him live. And yet another portrait, of similar treatment, boldly presenting a woman of mammoth bust and deep twin dimples. That would be—but Mrs. Gaffney was gently propelling them across the parlor and toward the kitchen.

Mr. Gaffney lunged past them, grinning hugely. He was no longer swarthy of face, but ruddy and wet, and away he went, clumping heavily up the tiny stairs. He had seemed to mumble something about a jiffy in that fleeting instant of contact. They followed their hostess through a sunny living room, and into the kitchen. It was such a white and glistening kitchen that the girl caught her breath at sight of it. It was light as the parlor had

been dark. A glimpse of zinnias and grape vines beyond the doorway. Out of the corners of their eyes Lisbeth and Jumbles saw the table with its fringed napery, the laden dishes, the brown loaf with knife beside. And then they were washing at the sink. It was quite like washing one's face on the farm at Back of Beyond, thought Lisbeth. Pump. Creak. Splash! Splatter! And a coarse linen towel, with blue lines for broider, slipping reluctantly over a shrill roller. They had their backs to the sink and were feasting their eyes.

“Sandwiches, huh!” gloated Jumbles hoarsely.

“S-s-s-s-h-h!”

Mrs. Gaffney moved effortlessly to and fro from

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stove to table and table to pantry. She brought a blue pitcher, all warty with knobs, to the sink, filled it from the pump, and set the pitcher beside its companion tumblers. She placed her hands to her hips and fixed her wonderful eyes upon the inner room. Somewhere a clock cried seven times.

“Oh, Horace!” called Mrs. Gaffney. “Oh, Plutarch!”

And Mr. Gaffney re-entered the kitchen with a rush. He was fully attired, and his necktie was scarlet, and in the knot of it perched a silver horse, rearing. Moreover, his great thatch of hair was in some semblance of order, having evidently been striven with. At the same moment there entered the house, through the kitchen doorway, a dwarfish boy whose head was ponderous as that of any savant. He carried a heavy leather-bound book in his hands, and his eyes were on its open pages. The boy looked neither to right nor to left, but seated himself at the table with the book still open before him.

“These are our guests, Plutarch,” said Mrs. Gaffney. “Their names are Mary Elizabeth and James Christopher. They have come a long way to have supper with us.”

“Have you?” asked Plutarch, lifting absent-minded eyes. He favored his father. The look he gave the guests did not seem to see them. “Far away,” he said, and bent above his book again. His lips moved as he read.

Then Mr. Gaffney began, with an air of good cheer that was the friendliest manner imaginable, to serve supper. There was a snowy mountain of mashed potato, with a great portion of butter running golden from its crater. There were string beans, tender as only this vegetable can be when it is excellent. There was a crockery bowl of creamed turnips, since

turnips were a staple of the farm. And there were many, many sorts of pickles,

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of those superior varieties that went to market in Cockaigne. And cottage cheese, preciously tinted with richest cream. And a vast pie of wild blackberries. But the masterpiece of the repast was a towering platter of fried chicken which, for all its area, could not have borne another drumstick without disaster.

“Don’t wait for me,” Mr. Gaffney besought his guests, and they were glad of this permission.

But presently, when they were busied with their plates, and deeply grateful that fortune had sent them to these kindly folk, Jumbles nudged Lisbeth lightly. And she, glancing about the table, perceived Mr. Gaffney to be breaking bread in a bowl of milk. Nor was there aught else before him. The expression of their host, as he dropped the last fragment into the bowl, was little short of doleful.

“Mr. Gaffney is on a diet,” explained his wife. “We think it is doing him a great deal of good. It is some months now since he has eaten anything except bread and milk.”

“Seven,” amended Mr. Gaffney glumly, “and nine days.”

“Years of devotion to his art,” pursued Mrs. Gaffney, “were almost the death of him. But here on the farm, thank heaven, I have been able at last to persuade him that nothing is so precious as health. We keep our own cow, of course. A Guernsey of the real island stock. Registered.”

“But I thought—” stammered Jumbles, reddening.

“Oh, yes, the bone!” laughed their hostess. “You thought it was real. Mercy, no! It’s merely a wooden one that Mr. Gaffney carved out of an old pine knot. He’s so clever. Yes, indeed. Meat is absolutely forbidden. I never have the least difficulty with Plutarch, however. He can eat anything without being distressed.”

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She smiled at the shock-headed son of the family. Plutarch read and munched steadily. He seemed also to favor his gifted father in the manipulation of bones. The guests noticed that the Gaffneys spoke of Plutarch almost as though he were not present to hear them. And certainly he gave no evidence of having heard.

“There was once a very wise man named Plutarch,” said Mary Elizabeth thoughtfully. “I can’t just remember what he wrote about, but he wrote something. Didn’t he, Jumbles? I suppose you named your son for him.”

“Never heard of the gentleman,” disclaimed Mr. Gaffney. “No, we named him for an elephant that traveled with the old show. I loved that elephant like a brother, I did. But he was killed in the wreck at Sweeney’s Junction. Twenty-odd years ago.” Mr. Gaffney sighed heavily at the recollection and lifted another spoonful of bread-and-milk. “You say this other Plutarch was literary?” he asked Lisbeth.

“Oh, very!” she assured him.

“There, my love!” cried Mr. Gaffney happily, as he turned to his wife. “I’ve always said it was the best of names for him! He’s not only named for the finest elephant that ever traveled with the big top, but for a great writer, as well. My dear old father would have been so proud. It was always his wish to have a man of letters in the family.”

“He does seem to read a great deal, doesn’t he?” said Mary Elizabeth politely, observing Plutarch still to be buried in his book, though he munched without intermission.

“Well, I should say as much!” returned Mr. Gaffney. “Do you know what he’s doing? He’s learning the encyclopedia by heart, that’s what. He’s somewhere in the C’s now—Cairo to Classification of Ships.”

“My goodness!”

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“Plutarch is studying to be a proofreader,” supplemented Mrs. Gaffney.

“Do proofreaders know everything that’s in the encyclopedia?” asked Jumbles in reverent voice.

“That’s just the point!” laughed Mr. Gaffney happily. “They don’t, though they ought to. I venture to say that scarcely any of them could tell you off-hand the exports of Abyssinia. And when it comes to the Z’s, why then they are positively hopeless, I’m told. But theirs is the very highest of the literary arts, and Plutarch will bring glory to it as I did to my calling.”

The youthful reader closed the heavy book upon his finger, clasped it to him, and rose from the table. He did not seem to see any of them, nor to be in the least aware of their presence. He began pacing up and down the kitchen, and after a few turns, speech issued tonelessly from his lips. And this is what he said:

“Cercopes—The two gnomes who worried and robbed Hercules in his sleep. A poem, bearing their name, is attributed to Homer. Cercopithecidae—A family of primates, containing all the Old World monkeys, other than anthropoid apes. The several genera are described and illustrated under baboon, langur, macaque, and many individual names. Cerdonians—A sect of Gnostics, founded—”

Here Plutarch paused, and Lisbeth was certain he had forgotten. It was almost as exciting as a spelling bee. But the scholar advanced slowly to the table, and as slowly took up his piece of pie, which dripped dreadfully. His parents did not scold him. They looked at him with eyes of loving pride. And pie in one hand, book in the other, he moved gravely doorward, words welling colorlessly as he quitted the kitchen for the yard.

“—by Cerdo, a Syrian who came to Rome about A.D.

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140, and developed ... Marcion ... two primal causes ... God of the Jews ...”

The voice was lost, and the company, save for Mr. Gaffney, turned to a discussion of wild blackberry pie, washed down by creamy milk, cool in the knobby blue tumblers.

“The greatest of blessings,” began Mr. Gaffney, “is appetite. My dear, a toothpick. (Pity’s sake, what for? marveled Lisbeth.) Or hunger, if you please.” He plied the toothpick as of old custom. “And hunger is the greatest democratizer. Give me a finical fellow, one who feels he can pick and choose over his victuals, born to the purple, golden spoon and all that, and let me place him for a day in the turnip patch. Hah! Where will be his mincings and his mannerisms at supper time?”

“He’d be pretty hungry,” agreed Jumbles.

“Hungry!” scoffed Mr. Gaffney. “After a day among my Perkin’s Purple Explosions!”

“Your what?” suggested Jumbles hopefully.

“The earliest and tenderest turnip that ever leaped from the soil,” said Mr. Gaffney. “Wormless, crisp, solid to the heart, and a full two weeks sooner than the Mammoth Early Eurekas. A full two weeks. Yes sir, a day in my turnips, and I’ll have him breaking all records for a dash to the Irish stew. While as for fried chicken—” Here Mr. Gaffney gulped and seemed fleetingly near to tears. “As for fried chicken,” he bravely resumed, “Well, as for fried chicken—” His voice fell away.

“Come Horace,” said Mrs. Gaffney brightly. “Come, now.”

They rose from table and went into the yard. It was near to evening, and nighthawks were hunting, and zooming, and soaring, against the wistful blueness of sky. At a distance, in an orchard, they perceived Plutarch,

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pacing with his open book. Jumbles wished to see the turnips and the cucumbers, and the Guernsey, and all such properties, nor was Mr. Gaffney disinclined to attend him. They moved away, speaking earnestly of Perkin’s Purple Explosions, and composts, and cold-frames, and patent fertilizers.

“He’s the best man in the world,” remarked Mrs. Gaffney, of her receding mate. “He was and is a great artist, and yet for all that he is a good farmer, too. I think that he hasn’t a single fault. Not one. You can’t imagine how kind and generous he is. And not a fault, Mary Elizabeth. Unless—well, perhaps.”

“Perhaps, what?” asked Lisbeth.

“He will clean fish in the kitchen,” said Mrs. Gaffney. “I simply can’t break him of it.”

“But they all do,” laughed Lisbeth.

“Oh, I suppose so,” agreed Mrs. Gaffney. “It’s too bad, though, because in all other respects Mr. Gaffney is perfect.”

They were approaching the spring, Lisbeth knew. She could smell the dampness of it, the clean, wet clay, the lush greenness that loves a spring. And when they came to it, where it was born among the gray-trunked alders, it was quite like the spring in the meadow at Back of Beyond. A woven bench of tree branches stood beside it, and twilight rested on the place, though it was not yet twilight elsewhere.

“It’s so lovely here, and quiet,” said Mary Elizabeth.

“The deer come down to drink, even at noon,” her hostess answered. “Look. You can see where they have set their hooves to the clay. I often sit here on warm days, with my mending. Or I bring the peas to shell. Sometimes the deer come down to drink while I am sitting here.”

“They do?”

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“They do because we never have harmed them,” answered Mrs. Gaffney. “And also because— Child, do you know what a sibyl is?”

“Yes,” whispered Lisbeth, for she knew all such things as that.

“I am a sibyl, dear,” confessed Mrs. Gaffney. “I have been so from childhood. That is why the wild deer aren’t afraid of me. And being a sibyl, though it hurts one’s heart at times, is a kind of compensation for being—well, for being as you see me. These eyes that should not belong to a person, dear. This horrible whiteness of skin and hair.”

“Oh, but I think you are wonderful!” cried Lisbeth. “You mustn’t talk so, Mrs. Gaffney. You mustn’t!”

“No, child. I am the creative error, or experiment, as you please. But I’m glad you are not sorry for me, and that you do not turn away nor stare. I think the staring is hardest of all to endure. I earned my living once by being stared at. I was not the great artist as was Mr. Gaffney. But I am a sibyl.”

Do you know what Mary Elizabeth did? Perhaps you do, but there’s no harm whatever in telling. She drew that white, white cheek down to her, and kissed it as she might have kissed her mother’s—the mother she never could remember. And there was a silence between them, in which they could hear the low chucklings of the stream that wandered away from the spring.

“Where are you going, Mary Elizabeth?” asked Mrs. Gaffney, but she did not wait for reply. “It isn’t this road you are taking now, although that’s part of it, and a part you shall never forget. It’s tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. Yes, I think I will let you see the journey you must take, and from which, having seen beforehand, you may, if you wish, turn back. Do you want to see all this, child?”

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“Yes,” breathed Lisbeth, and felt so queerly cold.

Stooping to the spring, Mrs. Gaffney plucked a small fern that grew beside it. On the frond rested a single crystal drop of dew. And Mrs. Gaffney held the frond toward Lisbeth, bidding her gaze at the heart of the dewdrop.

“Look, then,” the sibyl said.

The drop mirrored them, curvingly, and all the scene roundabout. But as Mary Elizabeth gazed steadily into it, the drop grew larger, until it was of a girth her arms could not have spanned. And her face departed the mirrored surface, and the alders and the ferns dimmed and were gone. The giant crystal was suffused with a cloudy whiteness, that twisted and crept and

swirled like cream in water. The whiteness faded and the charmed globe was clearer than water of paradise. Then Mary Elizabeth saw what she saw.

“Oh!” she gasped, and laughed eagerly. Yet even as she laughed her eyes were stricken to sorrow, and laughter died away.

“Ah!” sighed Mary Elizabeth, but even as she sighed, the sigh passed and her lips warmed to another smile.

“Why!” exclaimed the girl, and there were wonder and selfless pride in her voice, but even as she cried out her lashes were dampened by tears.

And love and laughter, and gain and loss, and anger and calmness, and pride and pity, and joy and sorrow, swept over the face of the gazing girl at that which the crystal revealed to her. And at the last was a serene and invincible contentment, in which were the wistfulness of memory and the goodly gift of knowledge. She thrust out a hand to the crystal, as though to grasp the shining substance of it—and there was only a frond of fern before her, with a dewdrop winking.

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“Don’t you want to turn back, child?” asked Mrs. Gaffney.

But Mary Elizabeth shook her hair that was dark as beech leaves, and turned her mist-gray eyes upon the sibyl.

“No,” she answered. “I won’t turn back.”

“Why not?”

“Because.”

“And that’s the very best reason in the world,” agreed Mrs. Gaffney. “Let’s go to the house.”

There was a star in the sky, and the star burned bright against that country twilight. Midway of the return they were overtaken by Jumbles and Mr. Gaffney, while Plutarch paced before them, the book held close to his eyes. The sweetpeas were thrice as fragrant as by day. Night fell quickly, and purple shadows crept beside the forest. They entered the house, and Mrs. Gaffney found a cot for Jumbles, and took Mary Elizabeth to her own room, and ordered Mr. Gaffney to rest with Plutarch, and Mr. Gaffney blew the light out, and the book fell heavily to the floor.

“Goodnight!” they called to one another thrillingly.

And it was very peaceful in that house, for love was resident there. Lisbeth went to sleep with the young moon peering at her between the breeze-stirred draperies

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CHAPTER VI.

Which treats of the crossing of the Mountains of the Moon.— And of the entry into the remarkable Country of Cockaigne.—How our travelers were greeted there by Mr. Hornblaeur in person.—With an account of their introduction to The Bird that wished for a bug.—Of the song that must be spoken and a phrase forgotten.



GOODBY, Mr. and Mrs. Gaffney! Goodby!"

It was an hour after breakfast, and dew was on the spiderweb. Somewhere a thrush was singing as though to break his heart. And, oh, but the world was cleansed, and fresh, and wonderful! And brimming with miracle, too. For there was the spoor of a huge ribbon snake in the cool dust. And yonder was a flower of scarlet all freckled with gold. And in its center, when they peeped at the glory of it, there sat a leaf-green tree frog with eyes of opal and broideries of bronze. And not a cloud in the sky, you may well imagine, and never a vapor across their hearts. Sing, thrush! Sing!

"They were the dearest folks, weren't they, Jumbles?" asked Lisbeth happily.

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"Yes, they were pretty nice folks," agreed Jumbles. "But then, you always find nice folks in the country."

"That's not exactly so," she said slowly. "Some folks that live in the country are like—let's see—well, they're like something that wants to be sour. They're stony and hard, just like some of the hill land, too. I can't tell you exactly what they're like. But they seem to hate everything and themselves."

“Oh, people like that are everywhere,” said Jumbles. “They’re that way because they want to be, just as you said. They could be like the Gaffneys if only they wished to.”

“No, Jumbles,” answered Lisbeth, “you don’t understand or you wouldn’t say that of them. There are farms that fight and fight with you, quite as though they knew what they were doing, and pretty soon you hate farming. And you can’t be nice to anybody.”

“When I get my farm, let it fight me if it wants to!” laughed Jumbles. “You’d soon see what I’d do to it!” And he looked so blithe and resolute, and wore such an air of certainty, that Lisbeth was ever so impressed.

Thereafter they turned to a speculative discussion of Cockaigne, where Mr. Gaffney marketed his pickles and turnips, and of what it must be like in that country concerning which the Gaffneys had dropped the most intriguing hints. For they knew, of course, that they were going to Cockaigne and that its sentineled boundary could be no great distance away. Mr. Gaffney had not been explicit as to the miles they must travel, and Mrs. Gaffney had smiled as she said she had never been there. A very curious sort of smile. But both had agreed that the travelers really should visit the country, since they were passing that way, and so arrive at their own conclusions.

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“It must be a queer kingdom that can’t grow its own cucumbers and turnips,” ventured Jumbles.

“That’s probably because the soil is suited to something else,” said Lisbeth wisely.

And coming down the road toward them, they perceived a singular equipage, drawn by a very diminutive and dispirited horse, whose collar was many sizes too large, whose ribs might easily have been tallied, and whose rheumy eyes were half-closed in apathy. The vehicle itself trembled, creaked and groaned, and each separate wheel threatened at any moment to desert the cart and seek a wayside resting place. A dingy tarpaulin hid the freight, whatever it may have been, but there were most interesting bulges and angles marked against the canvas, and glimmerings and gleamings were evident through rents and frayed places. The jehu of this shambling property wore a linen duster of bilious green, buttoned well to his throat and down to his shoes. His hat was a derby that had not been black for many seasons, and it rested loosely and at large upon his competent ears.

On his face, which was seamed and grimy, was that same veil of apathy which his horse contrived. Driver and horse seemed disillusioned and dispirited, rather than weary. From time to time the man in the linen duster poked at the lean rump of the horse with a goad of willow, idly and without apparent effect.

“He’ll know how far it is,” suggested Lisbeth.

“Hey, mister!” cried Jumbles as the cart drew abreast of them. “How far is it to Cockaigne?”

“Whoa!” said the driver tonelessly, and the horse seemed always to have been standing there, its head drooping.

“What say?” inquired the man.

“We want to know how far it is to Cockaigne!”

He doffed the derby from the baldest of all imaginable

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craniums, and gazed thoughtfully into the bowl of the hat. An enormous fly of velvet brown buzzed and buzzed about the horse’s withers. The horse flinched, and by this they knew that it lived.

“You’ve asked the right party,” said the man slowly. “I can tell you to the width of a skeeter’s whisker. She’s just seventeen versts, three furlongs, six leagues and a yardstick. That’s how far she is to Cockaigne.”

Lisbeth looked at Jumbles frowningly, because it didn’t seem to make sense, and Jumbles reddened at the reply, because he thought he was being chaffed.

“Well, how far is that?” he asked with a trace of truculence.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered the man. “But she’s exactly that far. She’s just back of them mountains, Cockaigne is.” He pointed with the willow goad. “The Mountains of the Moon,” he added.

And there were mountains! Strange the travelers had not noticed them before. For the mountains were quite near to them at the right hand. Jumbles was ashamed then of his petulance, and he thanked the man for the courtesy. Something in the nature of small talk appeared to be indicated.

“Do you farm around here?” he asked politely.

“No,” answered the man, restoring the derby to his ears. “No, I don’t. I guess you’d call me a junk man. Yes, you might as well call me that. I don’t mind it.”

“Junk!” repeated Lisbeth delightedly. “What sort of junk have you on your cart?”

“Dreams,” answered the Junk Man. “I get them in Cockaigne. Giddap, Oswald!”

He prodded the horse into life again, and the cart went creaking and complaining down the highway. Jumbles was certain that the man had not been quite himself, and that so sure as they were born they would find

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that he had escaped from an asylum somewhere. Junk men do not traffic in dreams, he reasoned. And Cockaigne, of all places!

“I’m not so sure they don’t,” said Lisbeth. “It only makes me more eager than ever to get there. Let’s hurry on, Jumbles, since we know where it is.”

Now the highway turned toward the Mountains of the Moon, or the travelers quitted the highway—Lisbeth was never quite certain which it was—and in a surprisingly short space of time they were high above the valley, with a cool wind in their eager faces, and alpine flowers all about them. It was Mary Elizabeth, turning to look backward, who saw the farm of the Gaffneys at a vast distance, and cried out with delight, and would have stood thus for some time had not Jumbles urged her to continue their journey. And she did so with flowers in her hair, and in her hands, and—so the boy would have vowed—with flowers in the happy eyes of her. But he said nothing of this because it seemed to him so preposterous that a girl should have flowers in her eyes.

Soon they were come to the snows that never perish, and with a savor of fear in their throats were skirting lofty cliffs of amethystine ice, unthinkable ancient, while at their feet were gaping purple crevasses which made them shudder. A bird rose roaring into the stillness, and the bird was quite like a pine grouse, save that it was white as the drift on which it had crouched. And a goat clad in sheerest ermine, with horns of polished ebony, came down the glittering ice wall to stare at them with golden, pagan eyes. They were brushed by the pinions of an eagle, and death was near to them a score of times. But each time they cheated him the travelers clung weakly to one another, and laughed and laughed. So at length they won through the forbidding pass that crawls

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terribly across the Mountains of the Moon, and went downward again to where the wind-warped, grotesque trees cling pitifully at timber-line, and downward still until there was dark forest about them once more, and

through the forest until they came to a prairie, broad beyond vision. From this prairie, quite near to the brooding forest, rose a towering rampart, that swung away and away to the left hand. So they turned thither, where it seemed there was a tremendous gate of bronze set in the masonry, and it proved indeed to be a gate, intricately bossed with a design of lotus flowers and clustering fruits. And the gate was closed against them.

Before the great gate of Cockaigne stood a sort of sentry box, from which protruded two columnar legs, clad in trousers of violet with military stripes of scarlet. The legs terminated in the shiniest and most prodigious boots. It was evident to the travelers that the proprietor of the legs was recumbent, half within the little house and half outside. If he was not actively on duty, however, his dereliction was of no great moment, since planted squarely before the boot soles stood a small, silken, brown dog, with an absurd nose, a quizzically ferocious expression, and brown, brown eyes that searched the faces of the travelers as though to have their inmost thought.

“They call it a siesta,” explained Lisbeth.

“They do?” puzzled Jumbles. “It’s a sort of dog I’ve never heard of before.”

“No, silly,” laughed Lisbeth. “A siesta is that nap he’s taking.”

“Do you suppose he’d mind if I woke him?” ventured Jumbles.

But before Lisbeth could decide just what to do, the little dog bobbed round and snapped sharply at a violet

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trouser leg. He did this not unamiably, but rather with an air of virtue, and the results were immediate.

“Ouch!” roared a deep voice within the sentry box. The box itself sprang suddenly up, and was tossed aside, and there stood a tall grenadier, very sleepy of eye, magnificent in purple trousers and scarlet coat. In one hand he held an enormous green busby, with a yellow tassel, and what seemed to be a yellow shaving brush rising above the crown. In the other was his musket, which he grasped by the barrel. He was plainly minded to rub the slumber from his eyes, and would advance this fist, now that, before he realized that his hands already were engaged. And he stared at the travelers in a most truculent, pop-eyed manner, like a steamfitter who has just heard a long word. Then he snapped the busby to his head, brought the musket to

present arms, and looked as military as Wellington. The little dog was open-mouthed with admiration, but the travelers scarce knew what to say.

“I think he wants the password,” whispered Lisbeth.

But for the life of him Jumbles couldn’t remember it, though he distinctly recalled that Mr. Gaffney had confided it to them. And Lisbeth was equally at loss. All they could remember of the password was that it had something to do with confectionery, but there is such a deal of this that the recollection was of little worth. They whispered and whispered to one another, while the splendid grenadier glared at them and the little dog gaped at the grenadier.

“For goodness sake,” urged Lisbeth. “Say something. He looks as though he might be going to shoot.”

“Peppermint wafers!” exclaimed Jumbles—and he could have bitten his own tongue, for he had only-meant to think it, not to say it. It didn’t sound like the right password, not quite. But it must have been! Because

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the grenadier looked thoughtful for a moment, a fateful moment, and then he smiled broadly, and thumped the musket butt against the ground.

“Pass, friends!” said the grenadier. “Where in tunket is that infernal key?”

He was searching all his pockets. But the little dog yelped thrice and dashed into the sentry box. He came out jerkily, tail first, dragging the key to his master. It was such a key as you will never behold, unless you get your name in all the papers, and go to Gotham, and are eulogized by the mayor. It was a key commensurate to the majesty and mystery of Cockaigne. And it was longer and heavier than the dog. Picking the key up, with a kindly word for his faithful attendant, the grenadier strode to the gate, beckoning the travelers to follow.

“I don’t see how you do it,” he observed admiringly, as he fitted the key.

“Do what?” asked Lisbeth and Jumbles in unison.

“Memorize such a password as that one,” replied the grenadier solemnly. He glanced all around him, and then whispered from behind his hand. “I’m forever dis-remembering it.”

The key creaked in the lock, and the lock whined to the key, and the heavy hinges of the great bronze gate of Cockaigne groaned wearily as the portal opened. And the travelers knew that they stood at the threshold of wonderland, being about to enter a province delightful beyond dreaming.

You should have seen the eyes of them when first they glimpsed Cockaigne. They took two venturesome, thrilling steps forward.

“Go right along in,” said the grenadier, and the gate clanged ponderously behind them.

Cockaigne!

All multi-colored and marvelous it was, with streets

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of pretty cottages, and cobbles bright and clean as though they had just been fetched from the river, and trees laden heavily with scarlet, golden and purple fruits. And the cottages were roofed with slates of many hues, set in charming patterns. Before each cottage stood small shrubs burdened brightly with fruit and flower. Trees similarly laden were beside the streets. There was the sweetest of scents upon the idle air, a scent as of many spices and rare essences, which seemed familiar to the enraptured travelers, but which they could not then identify, so great was their wonder. Before them stretched, broad and brilliant, an avenue of surpassing beauty, bordered by the gayness of fruit trees, and a sward that was as green as the meadows of heaven. Here and there were to be seen the subjects of the kingdom and these were clad as for festival, in satins and in silks. The Cockaignese strolled slowly, or stood and gazed at the beauty of the prospect.

“Oh, Jumbles!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth. “It’s quite like Spotless Town in the advertisements, only it’s ever so much nicer!”

“It smells good enough to eat,” remarked Jumbles, sniffing hungrily.

“Now I know what it smells like,” said the girl triumphantly. “It smells like cakes, and candy, and soda fountains. Doesn’t it, though?”

“That’s what everybody always says,” remarked a complacent voice. “And it should.”

Wheeling at the voice they were confronted by a dapper little man, with the faintest pencil of mustache, pale but purposeful blue eyes, and three fountain pens in his waistcoat pocket. How he had stolen upon them they could not know, but there he was with a thin little hand outstretched in welcome. Unlike those subjects of Cockaigne they had seen at some distance, who were attired

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as for a court function, the little man was dressed in sharply creased trousers with a pin-stripe, cutaway coat of broadcloth, and flowered

waistcoat. He was spatted and hatted and carried a malacca stick. So Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles shook hands with him, and, to tell the truth, his handshake was worthy of a stouter fellow.

“Smell Cockaigne first!” he said, and rose on his toes to teeter perilously for an instant, ere he brought his heels down with a sharp little smack. “On behalf of His Serene Highness, Adelbert, Prince of Cockaigne, and as official greeter of the Royal Chamber of Commerce, I bid you welcome to the kingdom!” Jumbles read the card the little man had placed in his hand. The engraved inscription, executed in a chaste script, was this:

PHONE HONEYDEW 372X
(ONE LONG, TWO SHORT)

CABLE ADDRESS
“WUMPF”

PRESENTING
T. HECTOR HORNBLAEUR

SECRETARY
COCKAIGNE ROYAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

“SMELL COCKAIGNE FIRST!”

LET’S GO!

“We’ve been smelling it,” answered Jumbles. “It smells a great deal like—like—well, like an awfully nice bakery.” He was quite red in the face as he stammered this opinion. But Mr. Hornblaeur was not at all offended.

“And it should,” he declared with satisfaction. “Cockaigne leads the world in that very respect. My friend, have you noticed the charming tilings and slates of our cottage roofs?”

“They’re very, very pretty,” murmured Elizabeth.

“Ah, ha,” chortled Mr. Hornblaeur. “Why, of

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course! They’re expensively fabricated of the finest cake frostings, every one of them! And see here—”

He hopped nimbly in air, seized upon the burdened branch of a fruit tree, and conveyed the tip of it to the noses of the dazed travelers with a gesture of invitation.

“Go ahead!” he urged them liberally. “Take as many as you wish!”

Now the fruit of this tree had seemed to be of the apricot kind, very comely and enticing, but when Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles plucked it and

tasted their enthusiasm knew no bounds. For though the flavor was of apricot, the fruit was clearly, and deliciously, a most ravishing sweetmeat. And they applied themselves to it without reserve. Mr. Hornblaeur beamed to witness their eagerness.

“All the trees of Cockaigne,” he explained, “bear not the common fruits of less favored climes, but veritable candies and comfits instead. As we pass down the avenue, you will observe the cherry, the pomegranate, the apple, the pawpaw, the orange, the lemon, the pear, the prune, the Peruvian blooch, the Mongolian mango, and many others too numerous to mention, all exquisitely done in superlative sugars, genuine vegetable dyes, and the true essence of the particular fruit that has been simulated. And nobody cares how many of them you pick. No! No! Nobody cares. ‘There’s a fruit to suit!’ I dashed that slogan off one day. And if I may venture to say it, His Highness was distinctly enchanted.”

Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles were staring wide-eyed at one another. They had even forgotten to reach to the delectable boughs. Their amazement was evidently of great gratification to Mr. Hornblaeur, for he teetered almost without ceasing.

“And as we continue down the avenue,” he resumed, “You will observe the royal free refreshment booths, in

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which—so we claim without fear of contradiction—will be found every sort of cake and pastry known to the culinary science. Again I urge you—help yourselves. There isn’t even a cover charge!”

“But I don’t see how you can afford to do it,” faltered Mary Elizabeth.

“Fiddlesticks!” replied Mr. Hornblaeur. “It’s simple enough. The more we offer to the prospective home owner, the more home owners will settle here, and the more home owners that settle here—well, you see how it works out, don’t you?”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” confessed Jumbles.

“Why, the more we can afford to give away!” declared Mr. Hornblaeur, and he positively radiated the spirit of progress.

“Well—” Mary Elizabeth began thoughtfully.

“But we are frittering time,” said Mr. Hornblaeur. “Let us talk of opportunity while I show you what Cockaigne has to offer.”

There was naught to do save follow where he led, but before they were fairly in stride Mary Elizabeth gave a strange cry, as of gladness and pity

blended, and stood looking upward at a tree branch.

“It’s only The Bird,” said Mr. Hornblaeur with a trace of impatience.
“Let us proceed.”

“But it’s such a sad looking bird,” protested Mary Elizabeth.

“It hasn’t any right whatever to be sad,” declared their guide shortly.
“It’s The Bird of Cockaigne, isn’t it?”

“The Bird of Cockaigne?” repeated the girl.

“Yes, certainly. We keep it to go with the trees.”

“And there isn’t any other bird, you mean? Only this one?”

“Why, of course, there isn’t. And I’m not sure but



The Bird of Cockaigne

that it is a great mistake to have it here, always moping around. I simply cannot persuade The Bird to see the advantages of Cockaigne. It has no—it has no—” Here Mr. Hornblaeur faltered.

“No what?” insisted Jumbles, for The Bird, though somewhat rumped, was to all appearance anatomically complete.

“I might as well tell you,” moaned Mr. Hornblaeur. “The Bird has no pep.”

And The Bird was, truth to tell, a remarkably disheveled and disconsolate fowl. Its feathers, which should have been of silken blue, were a dull and draggled drabness, and many of them were missing. So true was this of the wing feathers that they knew The Bird could not fly any great

distance, if at all. The large and spiritless eyes of The Bird lacked that avian lustre which is so gladdening to remark, and the very posture of the creature was one of hopeless resignation. He was perched on a bough just above their heads, where the brightness of the dangling sweetmeats served only to accentuate his dolor.

“The poor, poor thing!” sighed Mary Elizabeth.

“Thank you, Lisbeth,” said The Bird, in the saddest, huskiest voice. The girl gasped to hear him. And so did Jumbles for that matter. But Mr. Hornblaeur fidgeted and fidgeted, and made a show of taking out his watch and frowning at it.

“To think that you are a talking bird!” the girl exclaimed.

“Those who cannot sing must talk,” replied The Bird. “I lost my song long ago. Long ago. Lisbeth, if you have a song, keep it always and always, won’t you? Cockaigne is bad enough—but Cockaigne without a song!” And he ruffled his feathers even more.

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“It must be dreadful to lose a song,” observed Lisbeth simply.

“Oh, I’ve told you a thousand times to advertise for it!” said Mr. Hornblaeur testily, glancing at his watch again.

“I know you have,” replied The Bird, “but it wouldn’t be any use. I lost it when the fruit began to make my throat all sticky. That’s when I lost it. Sometimes I think I should have it back again if only I might find a bug. Or a worm. Most any kind of bug or worm. Even little ones.”

Jumbles had dropped to his knees and was scanning the ground sharply. The Bird watched him with the merest flicker of interest, but shook its head forlornly.

“If it’s bugs and worms you’re looking for,” said Mr. Hornblaeur with a grimace of distaste, “you may as well save your time. All such monstrosities as those are absolutely forbidden in Cockaigne.”

“Oh!” said Jumbles, scrambling to his feet, but he glowered at the unheeding Mr. Hornblaeur.

“I’m sure it must have been a nice song,” Lisbeth said to The Bird.

“We thought so,” was the melancholy answer. “My mate and I. I sang it to her, you know, when first we were mated. And that was an April morning, with bugs everywhere, just everywhere. If only I could sing it now, I’m sure she would come flying to me, over the mountains, over the forest, over the wall. Oh, I know she would!”

“I’m sure she would, too,” agreed Lisbeth warmly. “I suppose you’ve even forgotten the words?”

“No,” answered The Bird, “I haven’t forgotten them. It’s this way with songs, Lisbeth—when we no longer can sing them, they’ve a way of echoing, and echoing.

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So I remember most of my song, though perhaps I shouldn’t.”

“Oh, say the words, won’t you?” pleaded Mary Elizabeth.

“Well, I’ll try,” agreed The Bird.

“My gracious, yes!” urged Mr. Hornblaeur. “Let’s get this nonsense over with.”

Then The Bird of Cockaigne cleared its lean and scraggly throat, and in tones dolorous and husky, with hesitant pauses, declaimed these words:

SONG BEFORE NESTING

A wandering breeze is on the sod,
A vagrant breeze and bright;
Now there are bugs in every clod,
And all the world is right.
The cherry petals burst and drift
Above the clustered dew,
Upon the wind our wings are swift—
And—I—like—you!

I hope you're looking for a tree—
I'm very fond of trees,
When they are green as green can be,
Arranged in twos and threes,
A tree that's lonely for a song,
Though any tree will do;
Oh, any tree that comes along—
'Cause—I—like—you!

If I should spy a golden bug
I'll cast me from the sky;
The secret worm, though she be snug,
Shall fear my roving eye!
And you shall have the worms I bring,
Nor shall those worms be few,
The worms and bugs and everything—
Since—I—like—you!

The world is full of twines and strings,
And it is full of straws;
The world is full of vines and things,
And it is full of laws!
So choose a tree, and I'll not care,
Though any tree will do;
There's singing, singing everywhere—
For—I—for I—for I——

“He sounds like a phonograph with a scratched record,” whispered Jumbles, and earned an indignant glance from Lisbeth.

“That’s the place where I always forget,” The Bird apologized. “It’s the very last note of the very last line, too. If I could only remember what it was.”

“It must have ended just like the other verses,” said Lisbeth. “Why, of course, it would.”

“But it didn’t end that way,” protested The Bird. “I do wish I could remember it. When I sang it I used to think my throat would burst!”

“Not really burst?”

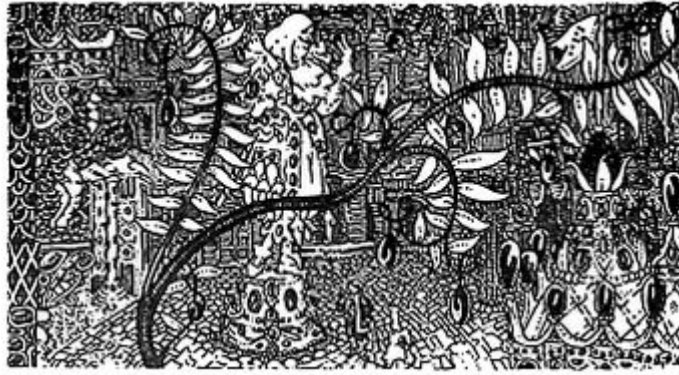
“Yes, really burst. You see, it ended considerably more emphatic. I wish —”

“Come! Come!” exclaimed Mr. Hornblaeur impatiently, and seizing each traveler by an elbow he propelled them from the vicinage.

“Don’t leave me, Lisbeth!” wailed The Bird. “Oh, please don’t leave me!”

Over her shoulder the girl could see him hopping wearily to and fro on his bough, among the glowing, luscious fruits of Cockaigne. Then her eyes dimmed for the great pity of it, and she called back to The Bird.

“I shan’t leave you, Bird! I shan’t!”



CHAPTER VII.

How our travelers strolled through the exceptional City of Cockaigne.—And learned of its several very remarkable advantages.—Treating also of the amiable Cockaignese and their instructive affairs.—How Lisbeth and Jumbles were granted an interview with Adelbert the Happy.—And of the nature of his happiness.



HE subjects of Prince Adelbert the Happy were quite the strangest people Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles ever had seen. All were well favored, and each was richly attired, but in the demeanor of them, even of the smallest child, a sullen resentment was evident, a confirmed and silent petulance. They looked at the strangers, convoyed by Mr. Hornblæur, incuriously but with a fretful malice. They appeared to have no occupation, other than that of idling, and their progress, when they moved aimlessly hither and yon, was a shimmering, insolent indolence. The countenances of the Cockaignese were remarkable not only for this strange fretfulness of aspect, but for a uniform pallor—the dead, smooth, milken pallor of cockle shells and larvae. Even as they did not salute

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the travelers, so they refrained from speech with one another. There were no voices in that city, whether of commerce, or of laughter, of anger, or of woe. It was a city of silence.

“There’s energy for you!” vowed Mr. Hornblæur, indicating his lethargic fellow subjects. “There’s the spirit that animates Cockaigne! Ah, the splendid fellowship of this fruitful land of ours! Can’t you feel it, my friends? Can’t you just feel it?”

What the travelers did feel, and it made them exceedingly uncomfortable, was a hateful hostility which did not trouble to mask itself. In their innocence, they thought it pleased Mr. Hornblaeur to be ironic, but as he warmed to his theme, extolling the civic spirit of the city, the noble and sprightly qualities of those who dwelt there, Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles realized that he really believed what he was saying, or believed he believed it. This realization made them more uncomfortable than ever. But they hastened to agree with him in his enthusiasms, since after all they were his guests, and knew their manners.

“And yet,” continued Mr. Hornblaeur, footing it along as nimbly as a dancing master, “we need new blood in Cockaigne. His Highness has so decided, and the Royal Chamber of Commerce finds itself in complete accord with him. So we’ve been reaching out—reaching out!” And he gestured primly, as though to draw to him quantities and quantities of the new blood Cockaigne would deign to accept.

“I imagine you have a great many home-seekers coming to Cockaigne,” said Jumbles, sampling a topaz fruit. It seemed somehow not nearly so palatable as the first one.

“Gracious, no!” responded Mr. Hornblaeur. “But we’re only just beginning. The fact is that you are the

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first. And what a distinction is yours, my friends! How I envy you! To be the forerunners of the contented millions and millions that are soon to settle here! Settle Where It Doesn’t Rain—In the Country of Cockaigne!”

Their guide fairly bristled with exclamation points. He was curiously not unlike one himself, and his faultless shoes were the little black dot. But never to have it rain? Not ever? Not again to witness the green awakening of the turf, nor to drink of that herald wind which bears tidings of thunder after drouth? Jumbles shrank from the contemplation, and mentally resolved that he, for his part, would not brighten a plowshare in such a land. And Mary Elizabeth was all one puzzled frown.

“Surely you don’t mean to say it never rains here?” she asked.

“Of course, it never rains,” replied Mr. Hornblaeur. “What would become of our tilings, I’d like to know? Of all this beauty and fragrance? You’ve seen a wet cake, I suppose? Well, then. No, indeed. There’s a very wise law against rain, and it is strictly enforced.”

“But the grass is so green and fresh,” observed Jumbles doubtfully. As he said this, however, he found himself beginning to suspect the greenness of the parkings and trim, flowered lawns. It wasn’t that the green was too green. Not that. For there isn’t any greenness like to the green of young and eager grass. But the grass was too something.

Mr. Hornblaeur, however, chuckled merrily. Stooping to the sward beside the avenue he plucked a tuft of grass and held it out to them. They touched it tentatively, to press it between thumb and forefinger.

“Well, I never!” marveled Lisbeth.

“What sort of grass would you call that?” asked Jumbles with ill-concealed disdain. “It feels like excelsior

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to me. Just like the stuff they use in packing cases.”

Mr. Hornblaeur’s anguish at this uncouth identification was distressing to witness—but Jumbles, frankly observing him, knew that a random shaft had flown to the target.

“Well, no!” protested Mr. Hornblaeur. “Not excelsior, exactly. Mercy, no! Yet yours wasn’t a bad guess for a layman. Ha!ha! No, indeed. These swards are all of the one material, and that material—which I scarce need say is fully protected by patents—we have called Stoopenfitchit’s Superior Synthetic Sod. A great man, our Dr. Stoopenfitchit, a benefactor of the race! His secret formulae—”

“You’d never have to mow it,” interrupted Jumbles thoughtfully.

“Certainly not!” agreed their guide.

“Though you couldn’t pasture a calf on it,” continued the boy, as to himself. “A small black and white calf.”

“Ah, no,” responded Mr. Hornblaeur. “But it comes in three patterns—with the yellow crocus, with white daisies, and with dandelions. The last is very, very popular, because, you see, the dandelions never go to seed. And yet, one may worry about them, and worry about them, as much as one pleases.”

“And not any of the flowers are real?” asked Lisbeth wistfully.

“I should say not!” Mr. Hornblaeur declared with satisfaction. “My dear child, you’ve no idea how superior they are to real flowers!”

Then Mary Elizabeth realized that she was hurting her palms, so tightly were her hands clenched, and she wanted more than all else in the world to have a dandelion at that very moment, a real one, that she might

stroke the gentle golden face of it, so like the sun at noon.

It has been related that no activities were evident on the streets of Cockaigne—but this is not strictly true. From time to time there would appear, in a decisiveness of haste, sundry individuals—either very lean and tall or very pudgy and short—who were attired in spotless white, and great aprons of white, with caps of white perched above their flushed faces, for the pallor of Cockaigne had not been communicated to these. Indeed, they seemed as alien to the kingdom as were the travelers, and Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles felt queerly drawn to them, so cheerful were they, so blithe upon their affairs. And it was observed that these people, both men and women, though truth to tell, most of them were men, emerged from and re-entered two vast structures that flanked the avenue, and which one would have vowed were enormous angel-cakes, had it not been for the many windows with which they were lighted.

“Who are those people?” asked Jumbles briefly.

“They seem so different, you know,” apologized Lisbeth.

“Those people?” repeated Mr. Hornblaeur, and he gave them no more than the flicker of a glance. “My gracious, they don’t really belong here. They’re not Cockaignese! I hope you didn’t think they belonged.”

“I’d like to know why we shouldn’t think that,” exclaimed Jumbles stoutly.

“They’re only pastry cooks and candy makers, that’s why,” retorted Mr. Hornblaeur with some heat. “And they’re a problem, too, I can tell you. They never stay. We bring them in from over the mountains, but they never stay. They simply will not stay. The labor turnover is something lamentable.” He sighed deeply.

“Why don’t they stay?” persisted Lisbeth.

“I think it’s because we pay them too well,” replied Mr. Hornblaeur. “And yet we have to pay them well to get them to come. If they had any ambitions worthy of the name, we shouldn’t mind offering them a share—that is, a kind of share—in the kingdom. But they haven’t.”

“You rather spoke of them as though they had some sort of ambition,” observed Lisbeth.

“Oh, the most ludicrous, quaintest ambition imaginable!” laughed Mr. Hornblaeur derisively. “Just as soon as they have a trifle of gold put by they are up and away across the mountains to raise chickens or rabbits somewhere. Some incline to chickens, and some to rabbits. But on one or the other of these vulgar vocations their hearts are set. Isn’t it devastating?”

Neither of the travelers could join Mr. Hornblaeur in his mirth, even politely. For Lisbeth was thinking of the chickens on the ranch at Back of Beyond, the chickens that were ever so far from her, of her pet cockerel, and of the delightful fuzziness of chicks newly come from the eggs. And she was thinking, too, of the wild woods rabbit that the Dark Woman had held in the curve of her arm. While as for Jumbles, he was staring at the complacent Mr. Hornblaeur almost wrathfully. He was certain he could see nothing absurd in wanting to raise chickens and rabbits.

“But I wish to show you what I have in mind for you,” said Mr. Hornblaeur wiping his eyes with a tiny square of handkerchief, which he tucked elegantly in his cuff. “I’ve just the opportunity for you.” So saying he diverted their course to a handsome side street, down which they walked through a glowering gauntlet of plump and pallid housewives and silently fretful children. “There it is!” he boasted as they came to a halt. He gestured proudly.

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“There’s what?” asked both of them, for there wasn’t anything to see, save a round little pond, hardly greater than a puddle, which drowsed beneath that cloudless sky.

“Why, there’s the water-front, of course!” said Mr. Hornblaeur. “And you shall have the very best location on it. You shall, or my name isn’t T. Hector Hornblaeur!”

The travelers looked dutifully at the pond. On its surface floated a motionless swan, pink as sundown, and a duck of some sort, black as midnight. The duck, too, was motionless. But the travelers were no longer to be deceived, as they had been by the grass. They knew the waterfowl for what they were. They were no better than greater versions of those celluloid shams that are sold for goldfish bowls. No watercourse, either to or from the pond, was visible. And they did not know what to say to Mr. Hornblaeur.

“Can you beat it?” asked Mr. Hornblaeur, as one who waives reply. “Can you even equal it? We’ve a right to be proud of our waterfront.”

"I thought waterfronts had ships, or boats of some sort," faltered Jumbles.

"Certainly they have," was the answer. "And that's your opportunity."

"But there isn't any way in nor out of it," protested Jumbles.

"Of course there isn't," agreed Mr. Hornblaeur. "That's why it's such an opportunity. All that it needs is development." He pronounced this last word as though it were fully capitalized, and possessed of magic and magnificent properties.

"I shouldn't think it would be very valuable," declared Jumbles bravely. After all, his heart wasn't in the development of the pond.

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"Not valuable!" shrilled Mr. Hornblaeur in horror. "Not valuable! Don't you realize that water frontage is always valuable? Mercy, yes! There's millions and millions in it. But we can talk of this later. I fear that His Highness will be expecting you now." He glanced importantly at his watch again. "Let us proceed," he urged.

Jumbles quite openly relinquished the frosted fragment of cake he had in hand. It fell to the false turf and sparkled there. There was a pallor on his face not unlike that which marked the countenances of the Cockaignese. Mary Elizabeth gave him a pitying, maternal look. He knew that never again, however many his years, would he care for cake. But as they walked toward the palace, he discovered that he felt better if he looked neither to left nor to right, where were the booths and barrows heaped high with pastries. And it was prudent also not to see the bending boughs of the trees.

"I was afraid of it," whispered Mary Elizabeth, and patted his hand.

Both Mary Elizabeth and Jumbles knew the sloth of trepidation as they advanced toward the palace, an expansive triumph of cake-frosting and confectionery, for it is not every day that one is introduced to a prince of the blood. Such an experience has given pause to many of our most distinguished citizens. But they reflected that, in any case, Prince Adelbert scarcely could be more than human, since all men are created free and equal, even though circumstance may seem to contradict this, and that if they but remembered their manners it would soon be over with. There was a flash of burnished arms as the guardsmen at the portal saluted them, and an immensity of burnished sweetmeats as they proceeded toward the throne room, and a dazzle of scarlet pages

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The Reigning Prince of Cockaigne

drawing back a somber arras on which gold-threaded knights strove mightily with spear and mace—and they stood in the presence of the reigning Prince of Cockaigne.

“Don’t be afraid,” whispered Mr. Hornblaeur. “Just walk forward to the edge of that silken carpet and bend knee to him.”

So they walked dizzily, interminably forward, in that vast throne room of crystal, and gilt, and ominous dark tapestries, to where Prince Adelbert the Happy sat on the throne of his fathers. And after a great while they were come to the edge of the silken carpet, and Jumbles was laggard to kneel, but Lisbeth nudged him for his manners, and they sank somewhat clumsily to the flagged floor.

“It doesn’t matter,” breathed the girl, as they knelt there. “To kneel before him is only the custom of the country.” Nevertheless she felt the boy shrug stubbornly.

“Arise, Mary Elizabeth,” said the Prince. “Arise, James Christopher.”

They arose and lifted their faces to the throne. It had been an agreeable, well modulated voice, with a trace of melancholy in it, and suited to the pallid, pleasing countenance they now confronted. Prince Adelbert, as were his subjects, was somewhat inclined to plumpness, but his look was not unkind, and indeed, a half-smile played about his lips. He was not yet in middle life, and the curls beneath his jeweled, heavy crown were fair as the young floss of the corn. The royal robes were a magnificence of purple and gold. He was beardless. His forehead was broad and gracious. And his eyes, so Lisbeth thought, were the saddest blue that ever looked upon this world. Beside the throne, whose golden dragons writhed upward into shadow, was a small table of

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exquisite craftsmanship on which rested a silver trencher. And in this trencher were slices—as Jumbles knew on the instant—of Mr. Gaffney’s famous turnips, girt with a variety of the celebrated Gaffney pickles. Even as the travelers recognized this provision, Prince Adelbert selected a slice of Perkin’s Purple Explosion and munched it meditatively.

“It is all my kingdom lacks, Jumbles,” said Prince Adelbert, holding up the slice of turnip. “This and the pickles. And the excellent Gaffney supplies them unfailingly.”

It wasn’t so difficult to talk with a Prince, Jumbles decided, though neither of the travelers had thus far spoken a word. Nevertheless it was evident that Prince Adelbert was quite like anyone else, save for his robes and his crown.

“You’ve certainly got a fine country, Prince,” said Jumbles. “If you could only get some water on it you might grow your own turnips and pickles.”

“No,” replied the Prince. “That was settled long, long ago, when Duke Caspar was regent. You know, of course, that we must have the turnips for their vitamins, and the pickles to sour our tongues that we may savor the pleasant sweets of Cockaigne—but it would never do to grow them here.”

“I suppose it wouldn’t, Your Highness,” said Lisbeth, for Mr. Hornblaeur had explained all that.

“And yet sometimes,” sighed the Prince, choosing a pickle, “I am wearied for the rain. I have heard much of the rain. Tell me, what is it like?”

And they told him how the rain walks over the countryside, nun-like and with bended head, and how the grass springs at her feet and the violets lift their small faces to her. They told him how the rain patters at windowpanes, and strums on roofs, evoking a contentment

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not otherwise to be realized, and giving sleep to the sleepless. And they told him how the rain marches with silver lances, and with banners of silver, and quickens the lake to a whiteness of dancing foam, and of how widgeon wing joyously through the rain, while the rain is filled with the trumpets of the wild geese. And they spoke also of the golden, laughing witchery of sun-showers. But at long last, when they were quite breathless with enthusiasm, and had no other words wherewith to tell of the rain, the Prince sighed more deeply than ever.

“I have heard,” he said, “that my father, Mortimer the Great, was wont to declare he had loved all manner of persons and things, but to feel rain on the uplifted face was best. Yet I am certain he must have been wrong in this.”

“Did it rain when he ruled here?” asked Lisbeth, forgetting to address him as a Prince should be spoken. Prince Adelbert didn’t seem to care.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “quite often. But that was before the Reformation. That was before my father died on this very throne, and left Cockaigne to the government of Caspar and the Lord Councillors—in trust for me. I was a babe in arms at that time, but I have always approved, as I did on my accession, of their mandate against rain.”

The dark tapestries to right and left, all shot with gold and silver thread, in figures mystical, stirred sweepingly as though one moved among them.

“And he was called Mortimer the Great?” asked Lisbeth, with the least accent of awe.

“He was called by that name,” answered the Prince. “And apart from his eccentric views on rainfall he was truly great. A man of small stature, I am told, but mighty in conflict and shrewd in council. A little man,

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my father, with puffed cheeks, an incurable baldness, and a cast in one eye. A laughable little man, by all accounts—had any dared to smile at him.”

The tapestries were stirred again, and all their shining, shadowy figures writhed and whispered. In the eye of the Prince was a moodiness to hurt the heart, and he brooded on his throne, his chin cupped in his palm.

“Yes,” sighed he, “my father was a little man and laughable. But his soul was a hero on a white horse.”

Then all the tapestries were still as death’s self, and the figures upon them stirred no longer. It was silent in the throne room of Cockaigne. After a time Mary Elizabeth spoke, for her sympathy went out to the beardless melancholy that brooded amid that splendor.

“Why are you sad, Prince Adelbert?” she asked, and there was the democracy of friendship in her voice.

“Would you know why I am sad, child?” The voice of Adelbert was low and musing. “Then will I tell you. I grieve that I can no longer grieve the lost dear friends of youth. And that is sadder far than to have no happiness in any memory.”

Again there was silence between those three. When the Prince spoke once more it was as to himself, with none to hear him.

“Ah, Marion of the wine-brown hair!” he said. “Whither have you and your song found hostel? You that were laughter and song’s self?”

The travelers could no more than look with pity at him, since it is forbidden, without permission, to touch even the shoon of any prince.

“Ah, Prosper of the high and happy heart, good friend, brave comrade!” mused the Prince. “What country knows you now? What worthier friendships have you found beyond our borders?”

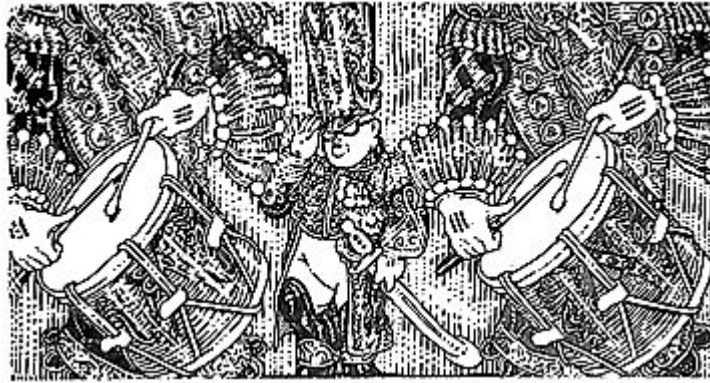
Then Adelbert of Cockaigne raised his sad head and

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looked at them, as though never before had he seen those two. And very slowly he drew back to the present, and he shivered slightly on his throne as though a breeze had chilled him. He smiled his half-smile at them, and signed that they might take their leave.

“Won’t you visit me again tomorrow?” he urged. “I’d like to have you. But now—” His voice seemed lost to him. “But now— Oh, leave me!” cried Adelbert the Happy.





CHAPTER VIII.

In which the reader will discover a thunder of drums.—And be told how Lisbeth and Jumbles fled the military.—Of the rescue of The Bird of Cockaigne in time of peril. — How those three raced to the great wall and scaled it desperately.—Of how The Bird requited their kindness.— The escape.



HE poor, poor Prince!" sighed Lisbeth. They were loitering across the great square before the palace, in the clement and celebrated sunshine of the land where it never rains. And Mary Elizabeth was reflecting that Adelbert the Happy was possessed of eyes far too agreeable to be dimmed with grief. It is just possible that Jumbles caught a nuance of this fancy in the words.

"The poor Fiddlesticks!" he scoffed. "If he's sad about it, why doesn't he do something? That's what I'd like to know. He's the Prince, isn't he? And he won't let it rain in his blamed old country! Serves him right if he is sad."

"Hush, Jumbles," she chided him. "Somebody will hear you. It would be treason to talk that way about a prince, I guess."

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"Treason, your aunt!" exclaimed Jumbles, and would have gone on at greater length, but for a sudden, wild outburst of clamor far down the glistening avenue, and the pulse-like thudding of a drum. The travelers stared and listened.

Distant they perceived the tall grenadier, who had swung the gate for them, leaping madly about and waving his arms as one demented, the while he shouted hoarsely. It could be none other than he, for the little brown dog

was dancing round and round him, and the shrillness of its barking came thinly to their ears. From all quarters the silken subjects of Cockaigne were hastening to the outcry. The drum was thudding, thudding, like a giant heart.

“Whatever is he shouting?” puzzled Mary Elizabeth, even as the words were borne to them on the light breeze.

“Turn out the military!” the sentry was crying. “To arms! Turn out the military! To arms!”

“Thud! thud!” and “Thud! thud! thud!” boomed the drum. Then somewhere, high and shining, lofty and sweet and grieving, the voice of a bugle was lifted.

“I suppose they’re going to have a war,” remarked Jumbles hopefully. “Or maybe it’s only a fire.”

And all on an instant, as it seemed, the farther avenue was glowing with the scarlet and purple of Cockaigne, and scores of tall grenadiers were marching into the radiance of the sun. Gallant was the glint of their shouldered muskets, and very brave and fine to see was the pomp and terror of them, which clutched one’s throat as with an urgent hand, and dimmed one’s eyes with quick emotion, and made the blood to race along one’s veins. The military!

“Oh, Jumbles!” gasped the girl in tribute.

“Gosh!” said Jumbles reverently.

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At the right flank of the grenadiers bobbed a round little general—for his rank scarcely could have been less, so brightly did he glisten—on a plump little charger, and as he plopped up and down in the saddle he wrought a glory about him with his brandished blade. The drum was silent then, the bugle mute.

“Halt!” cried the round little general, and scarlet and purple stiffened into stillness.

“Ready! Aim! Fire!”

Then all the muskets woke to flame, and the thunder of them was awesome. Flinders of frosting flew from the roofs of the cottages, and showers of fruit and foilage were shorne from the bright trees. The travelers could not comprehend this curious targetry, nor, for that matter, could the subjects of Cockaigne. These began to weave to and fro in silken tumult, tossing, breaking, flowing, and all the while the grenadiers kept up their

firing, to right and to left, high and handsome. And all the while the grenadier that had been sentry kept up his leaping and his outcry, circled by his little brown dog. The round little general plopped up and down on the plump little horse, and with some concern the travelers were aware that the grenadiers were marching toward them, volleying wildly as they came. The musket balls made silver curves, like drops from a garden sprinkler.

"I think we ought to go somewhere else," suggested Jumbles hastily.

"My goodness, yes," agreed Mary Elizabeth. "But where?"

"You ought to go right away," said a voice, and glancing down they saw the draggled, sorry, songless Bird of Cockaigne.

"It's because you gave him the wrong password," explained The Bird. "They're hunting the two of you,

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Lisbeth. You see, it was the wrong password. He's just remembered."

It would keep. Lisbeth swept low as a Cossack from the saddle and swung The Bird to her shoulder as they sprang forward. Her hand was clutched in Jumble's hand, and the breath of both came pantingly.

"You should have told him 'Peanut brittle'," said The Bird, jouncing easily. "That was it!"

"Oh, if they catch us!" sobbed Lisbeth.

"They'll shoot us, that's what!" gasped Jumbles.

"Save your breath," suggested The Bird. "They won't shoot you. All they ever hit is the houses. But it will be worse than that."

Fleeing though they were, and with the rattle of musketry sounding as it seemed at their very heels, the boy darted a questioning look at The Bird of Cockaigne. For in a way he was interested, you know.

"It's life in the candy kitchens, if they catch you," answered that doleful fowl.

At this Lisbeth, who knew that she was running as rapidly as ever she could, felt herself dragged forward at an even greater pace. They were fleeing without destination, with less of plan than has the harried rabbit when the hounds are on its track. Theirs were the sanded, desperate throats of fugitives, and almost it seemed their laboring hearts must stifle them. On and on, in terrored hopelessness. Behind them the bugle was calling again, and the tongue of it was a shining terror.

"You run fairly well, I think," observed The Bird judicially. "That's something in your favor."

And, so running, they came once more to the high masonry that shuts Cockaigne away from a less favored world—nay, they were running beside it, thwarted by the grim wall, unscaleable, final. There in full stride the girl faltered and fell, utterly spent, to the false turf,

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and The Bird, thrown from her trembling shoulder, came to earth with fluttering, ragged wings. Now Jumbles knelt tenderly yet fiercely on the harsh sod of that fortunate land, and placed his arm about her defensively, glaring backward at the oncoming muskets.

“Well, if you can’t, Lisbeth,” panted Jumbles, “you can’t.”

And he looked about for anything, cudgel or stone. Though the slim blade of Laughter dangled at his thigh he had quite forgotten it, as might have chanced with anyone so sore beset. A stout, thick stick, or yet a serviceable stone or two. But there is neither stick nor stone in Cockaigne. And now the drum began to pulse again. The grenadiers, their hapless quarry sighted, came brightly, bravely on with some semblance of order, and beside them curved the shimmering current of a thousand Cockaignese.

Then his hand pressed the softness of her arm momentarily, reassuringly, and he rose to his feet, and held his two hands outward, as to welcome what might come. But the hands were white and clenched, and there was a fleck of crimson on his nether lip, where the teeth sank in. Even in this extremity he was aware of a certain petulance toward The Bird of Cockaigne. For it was hopping stiffly about, quite unconcerned.

“You might have a try at that ladder,” said The Bird mildly, pausing to bend a dubious look upon a pebble that was not a bug. “It’s probably too short by quite a bit. But you might have a try.”

With a glad cry the boy sprang toward the ladder, so providential, so heaven-sent. Was there time? Why hadn’t he seen it before? Ah, time! The ladder stood propped against a fruit tree, and the fruits were of kindled emerald. And from tree to wall was no more than a score of paces. Now he had the ladder in his

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hands, and it wrestled with him stiffly, as though it knew and strove against his need. Now he bore it with a rush to the wall, measuring the masonry as he staggered. Would it serve? He set it firmly to the turf and brought the ladder to rest. A great, hateful shout went up from the advancing grenadiers

and subjects, a roar like to a cruel river in spate—for it was seen that by agility and daring the fugitives might scale the wall. The grenadiers quickened their steps and broke into a run.

“Charge!” shouted the round little general on the plump little horse.

“Hurry, Lisbeth!” cried Jumbles, stretching a hand to her.

The woeful pink huddle rose lithely from the ground, slim and eager once more, and those two were at the foot of the ladder that meant liberty.

“You go first, Lisbeth!” urged Jumbles.

The pounding of many feet, the clatter of arms, the lustful throating of the Cockaignese, were very near to them then. As she set foot to the ladder.

“Oh, take me with you, Lisbeth!” screamed The Bird.

Then Mary Elizabeth did a very foolish and most valiant thing, you must agree—such a thing as men have ventured life itself to do, and for the doing of which have felt the king’s sword on their shoulders and have stood straightly up in knighthood. For she brushed Jumbles aside, and stooped to that woeful fowl, in the face of a dire captivity, and she caught The Bird to her breast, and then—and then only—mounted the swaying ladder, with Jumbles climbing at her heels. You may well imagine the fury of the Cockaignese, the volleys of musketry that whizzed and whined and buzzed to no purpose, the barking of the little dog, the

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imprecations of the round little general. Up and up! Either to be free again, to feel the rain on their faces, or to toil for life in the candy kitchens of Adelbert the Happy. Up and up! Now Jumbles thrust strongly at her feet, for the ladder was short by a handspan or so, and she was sprawled on the broad top of the masonry with Jumbles beside her. It seemed fearsomely far to the soil of freedom, but with scarce a glance at the hazard Jumbles leaped outward, plunging to the fall. He struck heavily, rolled thrice, lay still, and then sprang upright and unscathed. He held out his arms to her.

“Jump, Lisbeth!” he cried.

“I cannot!” she answered him, and turned her face away.

A countenance rose redly above the wall, the countenance of a Cockaignese, its milken pallor flushed by the pursuit. An odious face, followed by odious hands that gripped the masonry, and by silken shoulders that surged to swing the hateful body upward. Lisbeth covered her eyes and sobbed aloud. And you may well assume that all had then been lost—for it was touch and go—but for the brave Bird of Cockaigne. The Bird cried out

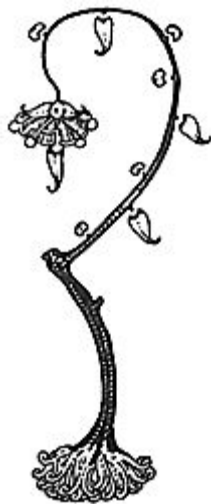
in a shrillness of rage and cast himself, wings beating, beak darting, claws snatching, in the teeth of the enemy. For an instant the face was lowered against this onslaught, since the Cockaignese could not well relinquish his grip to strike out at The Bird, nor could he quite contrive to bite that indomitable fowl. The Bird, as you might say, had him at a distressing disadvantage. He could neither retreat nor advance. Perceiving that fortune favored such a strategem, The Bird tweaked shrewdly at his nose. And the hands were uptossed, flailing, and the face was withdrawn like the face of a puppet. There was an exclamation of dismay, and ladder and Cockaignese went crashing back to the country

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where all is well. Though Mary Elizabeth never knew it, the fourth and fifth rungs of the ladder embraced the stout neck of the round little general, contributing in no minor degree to his wrath and discomfiture. And she could not know this because, with The Bird on her shoulder, she had mustered her courage and closed her eyes and leaped from the wall, downward to the beckoning Jumbles.

Over and over they tumbled, while The Bird fluttered clear, and when they came to rest they laughed away their bruises. None followed them, for it is forbidden to leave Cockaigne without the princely permission; nor, curiously enough, could they hear, strive as they might, the vociferations that must surely have been raised the other side of the wall. They drew fearfully, gladly, away from that fell masonry, venturing now and then a backward glance.

“I think it feels like rain,” said Lisbeth, and the words were almost song.





CHAPTER IX.

Of the very considerable pleasures of freedom.—And of the manner in which it came on to rain.—Telling also how The Bird encountered a bug, and that purpose to which he put it.—How there was gladness and comfort in the rain.—With the true account of what happened to The Bird.—And of their last glimpse of a friend.



OUR travelers were no great distance from the grim wall of Cockaigne, though it was sunk from view behind low, rolling hills, when The Bird, whose spirits had seemed to rise with every stride Lisbeth took—for he was on her shoulder, you'll remember—spied out a bug. It was one of those coleopterous jewels on which creation has lavished the dearest and most delicate art, and the sheen of it was really like to naught else on land or on sea. In some part it possessed, though with eudemonic darkness, a hint of the fire of faerie that bides in dewdrops, but the sluggard wingsheaths shone as never a gem might shine. The bug had tarried on a flowering weed, whereof the waxen, creamy petals formed blooms more beautiful than lawful blossoms. Sipping the nectared opiate

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of the weed, the bug revolved its languid, buggish thoughts, and in its dreaming knew an end to seeking. Oh, hide you, bug!

“Whee!” cried The Bird, and cast himself downward.

“Why, Bird!” the girl chided him, as she restored the fowl to her shoulder.

“It’s all in the point of view,” said The Bird, gulping convulsively, for the bug was sizeable.

“Perhaps it is,” agreed Lisbeth slowly. “But it was such a gorgeous bug, and it was having such a good time.”

“Well, anyway,” The Bird retorted virtuously, “bugs haven’t souls. And I’ve told you again and again how badly I needed a bug. You can’t imagine how warm and comfortable a bug makes one feel. Why, I’m a great deal better already. I am, really.”

“You’re talking nonsense,” interposed Jumbles rudely. “As though just only swallowing a bug could make anyone feel better right away.”

“I think I feel better, anyhow,” meekly replied The Bird.

“That’s a great deal different,” said Jumbles severely.

And he turned to look at The Bird. You may judge of his astonishment when he perceived, as did Mary Elizabeth, that The Bird actually looked different. Somehow The Bird’s plumage seemed visibly to acquire luster, and his frayed feathers to be mended, and his lean body to grow plump, and his sad eyes to brighten. He lifted his wings and beat strongly with them against the resistant air, thrice and again, as though to take flight. But, of course, they knew he couldn’t fly.

It came on to rain.

They were on the highway once more, though they could not remember having regained it, and all about

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them for an hour had been the semi-shadow, that tenderness of promise, which presages the slow, meditative weeping of the gracious sky. They lifted their hands, palm upward, to see if it might be true, and gladness was on their faces.

“There’s one!” cried Lisbeth happily, for the coolness of a raindrop smote her hand.

“And there’s one!” laughed Jumbles likewise.

“Ho, rain!” screamed The Bird, and parted his beak as though to drink.

It was a kindly rain, disposed to take its time about raining, and they upheld their faces to it, that the fingers of the rain might caress them. All the cobblestones, that had been dusty and gray, grew dark as burnished ebony, and the wayside foliage took on a deep and glistening green. Very steadily and gently it rained, and though the garments of the travelers were soon wetted through, nevertheless their bodies glowed with well being and the brisk delight of walking down the miles. They sang little scraps of song one to another, and they raised their voices together—whereat The Bird

scarce could contain himself, but hopped restlessly, gleefully, about on Lisbeth's shoulder, making singular, bright noises in his throat. The laden clouds formed a holy processional across heaven, deliberate, dignified, and mute with the vow of silence. Crows cawed.

"Lisbeth," said The Bird again.

"What is it, Bird?" she asked.

There was a long pause. The Bird hopped nervously up and down the slope of her shoulder, and opened his beak as though to talk, but no words issued. The eyes of The Bird were brighter than ever the travelers had known them to be, and his plumage was glossy to the least feather. The Bird peered at the girl's face, cocking his head, and hopped away, and hopped back to peer

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again. Lisbeth looked wide-eyed at Jumbles and his eyes were widened, too.

"Please tell me what it is, Bird," the girl urged anxiously.

"I think—" said The Bird, and faltered. His utterance was vague as writing that is half erased.

"Yes, Bird," said Lisbeth.

"I—think (and here a long pause) I—am (and here another) forgetting—how (and here a third) to talk!"

Not a word more could The Bird say to them, but he touched Lisbeth's lips with his beak, and lingeringly, and he raised his wings with quick, sure gestures, and beat against the little wind. Then The Bird no longer was on the girl's shoulder, but on a bough, instead—and the bough was white with sprays of blossom. Lances of silver rain thrust past The Bird, slanting down to the loam, and The Bird raised his eyes to the rain, and swelled his throat with happiness, and woke the world to song. They stood in the rain and listened to that singing. They stood tranced before The Bird. Their own throats ached with the wonder of it, and theirs was that joy which is near kin to tears.

The Bird sang and sang, as though he was hungry for singing, nor had he a glance for the travelers then. He had fixed his eyes upon the heavens to southward, and out of the south, far and far against the cloud, came a speck that grew larger and swiftly larger, driving toward the white thorn as an arrow fares. There was a thrumming of wings, a flash of dark feathers downcast—and two Birds were on the bough against the white blossoms.

Briefly they perched thus, while the song waned to a trickle of melody. Then the two Birds rose as one, circling the travelers with short, brisk wing strokes, and rose soaring to fly away southward. They were gone.

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“Jumbles,” said Lisbeth.

“Well?” asked Jumbles somewhat gruffly.

“The other one—” ventured the girl.

“Goodness sakes!” exclaimed the boy. “I guess I know who the other one was. Those silly old Birds. We’ve wasted time enough.”

Why he should be so ill-humored, Lisbeth simply couldn’t imagine. She had to run a few steps to catch up with him. And her shoulder felt oddly light and lonely without the weight of The Bird.



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CHAPTER X.

Treating of the discomforts that attend a rainy twilight.—Of how a fire beckoned redly to the wayfarers.—Of their fortunate meeting with a most remarkable adventurer.—And of the tale he told them while it left off raining.

NOW in all truth it may be, as Mortimer the Great was wont to tell his courtiers, that to feel rain on the uplifted face is best. Yet after a time, the rain continuing to descend, one loses the glamor of such philosophy, the solace of it, together with one's joy in the rain. The blithest footfall grows laggard with weariness and chill, and the heart yearns for any sort of shelter—for a hut and a fire. Yes, the heart cries out for the consoling and benevolent flame. And it will seem to the least captious that something is amiss with the most celebrated saying of Mortimer the Great.

The hour being toward twilight, the early, gray twilight of rain, Lisbeth and Jumbles sang no longer, but looked anxiously down the highway for such hostel as the land might afford. And with each heavy step their weariness increased, their spirits sank dolorously, and

they were secretly afraid. Though neither would have admitted it, they were for the first time apprehensive of their adventure, and would have been glad, indeed, to wake and find it naught save a dream. But it was only too real, and after all, they were scarcely more than children. A lone land. A gray land dimly passing in the grayness of the rain and the twilight. You who are warm and snug at home, who have both firelight and lamplight to comfort you, to minister to you, scarce can imagine the relief and delight of

the tired travelers when they perceived, shining redly through the gloom, the flare and twinkle of a distant fire.

“Oh, Jumbles!” exclaimed Mary Elizabeth joyously.

But they did not hasten toward the fire. They halted on the highway and looked longingly toward it. They knew, as many a wayfarer before them, that a flame beside the road, with night visiting the land, is both a promise and a menace. Will it mean welcome and warmth and companionship? Or will it mean chillness and malice? Or even the bared knives of godless men? Thus they paused to look long at the beckoning redness of the fire.

“It might be tramps,” said Jumbles slowly. “Or it might be hunters.”

“Or it might be where a farmer is burning stumps,” suggested Lisbeth.

“Whoever it is, we can’t stay here any longer,” declared Jumbles. “You wait, Lisbeth, while I go and see.”

“I sha’n’t wait,” she answered firmly. “If you go, I’m going too.”

And suddenly it was quite dark, and colder than ever, and the rain strove against them as they walked slowly, warily, with many pauses, toward the fire that burned beside the highway. And taller and ever taller rose the

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redness of the flame. The light of it was golden on the spreading branches of a great pine. It wrought a circle wherein were warmth and refuge, did the flame, and outward to the travelers fell the wavering shadow of the man who had risen to add fuel to his fire. An innumerable company of sparks rose in bright escape. The man stood now with his back to the blaze. And the travelers stood yearningly beyond the circle, as instant for flight as wildlings, yet hungering for fellowship. The rain was thrice as chill because of the nearness of the flame. The man was smoking a pipe. One moment his face would be in darkness, dimly seen, and on the next a searching tongue of fire would bring it boldly forth. They felt that the man could not see them in the wet night, where they whispered. It was a good face. Should they go forward? No. Yet they could not remain where they were. That was true. Oh, flame! The man beside the fire took the pipe from his mouth.

“It ought to be easy to choose between the rain and this,” remarked the man.

Why, he had read their very thoughts! It was impossible. To whom had he spoken?

“What are you waiting for, Lisbeth?” asked the man. “And you, Jumbles?”

Between voice and warmth they were drawn to the fire, where the man waited them. He had replaced the pipe in his mouth—the blackest and shabbiest of all possible pipes—and his eyes were quite friendly and acquainted. Somehow they forgot every fear on the instant, and were laughing with him, and talking with him, as though he were an elder brother who had expected them. And thick steam rose from their wet, wet garments, while the benevolence of the fire drove away the chillness, and soothed them until they were sprawled beside it. Already their chance-met friend, if so be it our

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friends are ever met by chance, was frying bacon in a small pan, and peering into a vaporous tin whence rose the fragrance of coffee. Beneath the broad brave branches of the pine were the fire and this companionship, and the rain was forbidden, as though in another and happier Cockaigne. Then the travelers began really to enjoy the rain once more, for rain is also friendly and comforting when one has shelter and fire and food.

“Are you just traveling or going somewhere?” inquired their friend quizzically.

“We don’t really know,” answered Jumbles, after a moment.

“It is enough to know that one doesn’t,” laughed the man beside the fire.

They supped hugely, without manners, on butterless bread, and crisp bacon, and heartening drink. Their laughter rose lightly, genuinely, as a jest at the expense of the darkness and the rain. And when they were quite refreshed with good fare, their friend filled the black pipe and lighted it with a twig, and they stretched themselves in creature comfort to talk.

“We’re lucky we found you here, I think,” sighed Lisbeth happily.

“There isn’t luck,” he answered. “There is only coincidence.”

“It doesn’t matter what you call it,” remarked Jumbles. “All the same, I think as Lisbeth does—that we were mighty lucky to find you, of all persons, when we didn’t know where we were going to dry our clothes, or what we were going to do.”

The man puffed at his pipe and smiled. He was dressed in well worn corduroys, with a blue flannel shirt, and high laced boots. His face was seamed and tinted by wind and sun. His eyes were forever amused, but gently. Jumbles hazarded a surmise.

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"I guess you must be a logger," said Jumbles.

The man shook his head slowly, continuing to smile. "Well, then, you must be a forest ranger," suggested Jumbles with increasing embarrassment.

But their friend shook his head again.

"Then you're a hunter," blundered the boy, desperately.

The trace of a frown answered instantly. But the pipe came down from his mouth, and the smile returned. He knocked the ash out against his bootheel.

"No," he answered, "you're wrong again, Jumbles. I'm not a hunter. You'd never guess what I am, when I'm home in the city. And I'm almost ashamed to tell you."

"Whatever you are," exclaimed Lisbeth loyally, "I'm sure you are one of the best men in that old city. I don't care how big it is, either."

"Thank you, my dear," he said, slowly refilling the pipe. "I'm scarcely that. But I suppose I might as well confess to you. When I'm at home I'm one of those curious, errorless human mechanisms that work with figures and sums, and deficits, and balances. Yes, I'm a Certified Public Accountant."

It had an awesome sound, and they weren't wholly certain what it might mean. That it was somehow identified with arithmetic they were assured, and they exchanged hasty, horrified glances. But the looks they turned on him were looks of tribute. For he was one to whom serried columns of numerals, and the intricate snarls of mathematics, were without terror.

"I'm so sorry you don't care for your work," said Lisbeth. "But I can't really blame you. What puzzles me is—" And she ceased.

"What is it that puzzles you?" asked the Certified Public Accountant.

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"Well, there isn't anything to certify around here," stammered Lisbeth. "I mean there isn't any arithmetic in the forest. Oh, I don't know what I mean."

"What you mean is clear enough," he answered. "You are thinking it strange that one of such employment should be discovered where you find me. But that isn't strange in the least. For here is the cure for my vocational malady." He gestured outward from the firelight with his pipe-stem. "When the columns of figures march across my pillow at midnight, I realize that I must visit some such vicinage as this. They cannot march here. I am free of

them. And when I return to them, they and I are on good terms once more. They are glad to have me back. They are docile again.”

“But it isn’t always easy to get away, is it?” asked Jumbles.

“It’s easy enough if you only wish to,” replied the Certified Public Accountant. “You’ve only to think of a good reason. And since any reason will serve, all reasons are good. This time I thought of my mother-in-law. Yes, it was on her account that I came here.”

Now both Jumbles and Lisbeth knew, as by common report, that mothers-in-law are the abiding distress of their sons by marriage, and they were prepared, by much remembered gossip and cruel jest, to give freely of their sympathy to this excellent companion. But he, on perceiving the doleful, commiserating looks they bent upon him, shook his head once more.

“Not that,” he said. “I came to find a flower for her.”

“To find a flower?”

“Surely to find a flower, and to bear it back to her garden. With each returning spring she sighs, my mother-in-law does, for the wake-robins of her girlhood. So I have come to this place, in my selfishness, to dig a dozen wake-robins and carry them home, that she

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may tend their bloom in April, and so have her lost girlhood again. Meanwhile I loiter shamelessly. I am indolent. I put off the return. Tomorrow, perhaps.”

There was a long silence, but it was a silence filled, for the travelers, with self-reproach of their own unworthiness.

“You’d love my mother-in-law,” he said. “I do.”

“I’m sure we should,” agreed Mary Elizabeth.

“A tiny bit of woman, with a black silk dress and a lace collar?” asked Jumbles, and this was a rare flight of fancy for him.

“Great Jupiter!” cried the Certified Public Accountant, rocking with laughter. “No! Not by a long shot. Mother must weigh twelve stone, I should judge—and she’s on a diet. She dresses more like a girl than my wife does, bless her. She likes to think she’s just as young as ever she was, and—on my soul—I believe she is.”

In the deepness of the dark and dripping forest an owl began to call. Kitty-kitty-kitty. Over and over. Kitty-kitty-kitty. The three listened to it

and joyed in the mystery of the sound. The shadows had found a tongue. The night was vocal.

“She’s calling her kitten,” sighed Lisbeth. “But he won’t come. Or maybe he will. I wish I might call Yowler to me from Back of Beyond.”

“Yowler’s your cat, I take it,” said the Certified Public Accountant. “Yes, cats are like that. Perhaps they will and perhaps they won’t. There is really no way of telling. But the owl isn’t calling her cat. The owl calls for love or hunger, and which I cannot say. Now if I were only a bushman, or a savage, instead of what I am, I could tell you.”

“You could, all right,” agreed Jumbles solemnly. “Crows talk until you can almost understand them, and

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blackbirds say something nobody ever has heard just before they fly.”

“And cranes, too,” said their friend. “Cranes have voices that men have interpreted, for all our dullard wits. I think that once, and ever so long ago, it was easy enough for people to understand what the birds and beasts say and think. I do not mean that this was in the Lost Garden, not exactly. But sometime when the race was young.”

“That’s what I think, too, I guess,” answered Jumbles lazily.

“I read not long since,” continued the Certified Public Accountant, “of a certain dog whose master had taught him to utter a few words, of the simplest. In my opinion this is a dangerous business and cannot be too hastily abandoned. It might even be that such a dog would speak his secret thought concerning us.”

Then there was silence again between them, as each pondered and pondered just what a dog would be apt to say of people, if a dog might talk as we do. The speculation was one of mingled amusement and alarm. Jumbles tossed a stick on the fire, and the flame fed hungrily once more. What would a dog say of a dog’s master?

“You see,” resumed the Certified Public Accountant, “we have forgotten that ourselves and the creatures are journeying on the same pilgrimage, toward a destination none of us can descry, and the nature of which our wisest men can only imagine. Now, I for my part, offering no undue concessions to the creatures, nevertheless conceive that theirs also are the rights and privileges of pilgrimage. This being true, I find it in my heart to wish that some of us were less cruel to them, and others were more tolerant.”

"If tolerant means what I think it does, I'm afraid

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I can't always be that," declared Jumbles. "You can't be tolerant of an ant down your neck."

"You can and should be tolerant of all creatures, things and opinions except intolerance," their friend insisted. "An ant down your neck would, of course, be an intolerant insect, and you might deal with it as you chose."

"But tigers and wolves are cruel," objected Lisbeth.

"And are they so?" he asked. "Cruel as they may be, they yet should come to man for lessons in cruelty. I once saw a teamster beat his fallen horse so severely that the snow was glorified with its blood. And as I witnessed this I reflected that it scarcely is necessary we should travel to India for the hunting of beasts of prey."

A silence once more, wherein the little lean flame gossiped of release from the wood. Up and up, and into the darkness—and gone, quite gone. Who knows whither?

"The fact is," continued the Certified Public Accountant, "that none of us is true to the first mother, to Nature, herself. For if we were better animals, while retaining our hard-won wisdom, there would be little of discontent or unhappiness in the world. But we lose contact, more and more we lose contact. And the time must come when we shall have forgotten all the priceless truths that once were one with the blood in our veins. I cannot even venture to forecast the triumphs of that time, the man-made mechanisms and miracles. But vast, and shining, and wonderful as these are certain to be, man himself will be but a poor travesty on our Father Adam."

He was filling his pipe again.

"It is very possible," he resumed, "that my viewpoint is without merit. You may, therefore, regard it only as

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a sort of protest. For there is something, too, in the fiber of man which avails to save him from himself when there is need. In every century there is one of whom we may say, in truth, 'God drew him as a blade is drawn.' Nevertheless, in these times it would be pagan to walk bare of foot upon the lawn, after rain has fallen, as often I desire to walk. No. It would be far worse than pagan. It would be unconventional."

It must be confessed that Lisbeth and Jumbles had not followed him in all he said, but they had been properly attentive, and his voice was so low and agreeable, and kindly, that it was amazingly easy to hear. They were glad to be with him, and near him, and to have his words in their ears. And they were beginning to feel the reaction of warmth after chill, of food after hunger, of security after fear—which is a contented and unhurried drowsiness.

“What did you mean,” asked Jumbles idly, “when you said that everything, the creatures and us, and all, is going the same way?”

And then, so drowsy were they, and so gentle was his voice, that he drew a picture for them beyond the firelight, on the darkness we call night.

At the first, as the low voiced words wove softly round her, Lisbeth perceived no more than a curious, fluent hue against the sky, as though day were returning—milky, changing, spreading as a spilled pool widens. But presently, the words having their way with her, she quite forgot she was listening to the Certified Public Accountant, and did not remember where nor who she was, nor to what adventure she was committed, and even that she was companioned. For the pallor of the illumination drove back the night, and became quite all the world there was—and the milkiness curved, and twisted, and spun within and about itself like meadow

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mists that strive to depart the meadow. The pallor seemed to flow onward and somewhat upward, toward a brightness as of early sunrise in summer, and she reflected, so significant were its strivings, that it must indeed be alive. Nor was she astonished to discern, as the moments passed, the semi-separation of shapeless, quivering, transient forms from the general vapor—of forms too impressionistic and impermanent for dream. Yet these, for all their intangible nature, comprised somehow a living procession, and as they writhed and yearned forward, striving with vast sluggish labors against a detention not evident, Lisbeth perceived the foremost to vanish while the rearmost assumed more definite outlines, becoming creatures curious beyond fancy, yet recognizable as flesh and blood. Thus the milky pallor took life unto itself and was as a current flowing beyond vision; and clearer and ever clearer became the beasts her eyes beheld.

And such preposterous beasts they were, indeed! They were as nothing that man remembers, neither in this life nor from another. They were chill, and terrible, and dread. They were scaled, and clawed, and fanged. They

were monstrous past all imagining, and Lisbeth shuddered to witness their progress, and would have closed her eyes against them if she but could. She was shaken by fear, but even as she knew fear there grew a second pallor above the first, above the eager plodding beasts of nightmare, and this pallor in its turn achieved a semblance of form, radiant and comforting. Then the girl's heart was strong with gladness, for she anticipated the form that must soon be revealed—knew also that it would be the very spirit and guide of the processional—and she held her hands toward the second pallor with a low cry of welcome. And huge, above the dreadful creatures that wallowed, and fought, and marched, and

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swam, was the tall, immortal presence of the Dark Woman. Then Lisbeth knew that all was well, and she cuddled down as contentedly as a kitten to watch what might befall. Now the nature of this most reasonable phenomenon was triune, you must know. First there was the processional itself; and second there was the gracious and administrative presence of the Dark Woman, dwarfing all else; and third there was the seeming sunrise toward which all trended. Mary Elizabeth told herself that, when all was said and done, it really was simple enough.

Very gradually, but with reassuring persistence, the character of the living current was modified, and in the onward flow of the beasts Lisbeth recognized creatures that were comparable to those of the geographies and the farm yard. They were odd enough, in all truth, and this was particularly true of the horses, but nevertheless she knew them for what they were. She was at some loss, however, to identify several of the creatures, for all their suggestion of something or someone she should know—so shaggy and fearsome were they. But when one of these turned its look toward her she was no longer at loss, for in the fierce and feral eyes, beneath their bending brows, was that remarkable something we distinguish as dream—and by this Lisbeth was aware that it was man. It was man, with his inventions, crafts, culture, conquests, wars, songs and lamentations latent in the embryo of the dream that shone from his wild eyes. The eyes alone were the man's redemption.

And still the processional moved onward, and somewhat upward, while the beasts became more and more familiar to her and man himself a confident creature with a heavy sword at his flank. She would have vowed

that certain of the animals were the very ones she had known in the pastures and forest of Back of Beyond,

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The immortal presence of the Dark Woman

and almost she called out to a slim sorrel mare that had gone lame. Surely it was Dolly the beloved, who died of a gunshot when she broke her leg. Oh, Dolly! But Dolly was gone. By this time all the creatures were known to her, and the men and women were those of her books and of her usual life. But still the current persisted, flowing steadily, and her pulses leaped to the enormous thought that soon she would see Tomorrow and Tomorrow! The emergence of that which is so jealously retained by the future, and which

our sagest prophecies so imperfectly anticipate! Now one is warranted in believing that Lisbeth stood, indeed, upon the verge of a momentous and altogether remarkable revelation—and that she should, indeed, have seen beyond the veil but for the fact that all in a moment she was aware again of words, and that with this awareness the living picture faded and was no more.

“It is a pilgrimage to which all are committed,” the Certified Public Accountant was saying. “Why should man be so arrogant concerning his destiny? Both he and the creatures fare by the one path toward the same dawning. It pleases me to think that the destiny is good. That spirit pervades all—and that spirit survives all. Are you sleepy, Lisbeth?”

“Did you see her, too, Jumbles?” asked Mary Elizabeth, not answering. Oh, if it might be that Jumbles had seen her also!

“Did I see her?” repeated Jumbles vaguely. “Say, Lisbeth, I’ll tell you. You’re so sleepy you don’t know what you’re saying. Isn’t she?”

But the Certified Public Accountant only puffed at his pipe, and twinkled at them, and shook his head—which might have meant that he agreed with Jumbles or that he didn’t. He yawned prodigiously.

They made her a bed of spicy boughs, and the Certified

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Public Accountant spread his lone blanket over her. He and Jumbles talked for some time beside the dying fire, and though the mumble of their voices kept her awake, still it made her drowsier than ever, too. Then her two companions stretched themselves near the embers and were soon asleep.

A star ventured out, just beyond the branches. And Lisbeth, thinking sleepily of Back of Beyond, of Old Susie, of Aunt Emma and Uncle Henry, of Dewey the dog, and of Yowler the cat, remembered that stars, when they are first stars, are meant for wishing. So she began:

Star, star, burning bright,
First star I’ve seen tonight ...

Midway of the verse and the wish she failed to recall the rest of it, or to remember her wish, or aught else, for that matter. And this was in nowise strange. Not in the least. For Mary Elizabeth was fast asleep.





CHAPTER XI.

In which Jumbles is besought in vain to smite a shield.—Of what befell when Lisbeth dared the venture.—Their introduction to the Old Knight who made ready for a great trout.—How Sir Marmaduke of the Moor came by his entitlement.—Together with certain commentaries on chivalry.

NOW the travelers were well upon their way, they knew not whither, before the sun was high, and there was happiness in their hearts because they were young, and the world likewise, and also because & they had found a friend in the rain. The countryside was sweetened and comely, and so greenly clean that it sparkled in the morning. It seemed they could not walk with such a day as this, but must race forward, laughing at nothing whatsoever, until spent with running they paused to look at one another with shining eyes. There were little green and gilt frogs on the clay beside the highway, and there were wild brant against the deep blueness that was the sky—and, oh, how the scent of wet fern at seven of such a morning seeps into the heart for the years to recover! A wheeling

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hawk shrilled at them from heaven, and followed their mimicry for a long mile. The savor of life was in their happy throats, but they knew only that the day was good.

So running, so laughing, Lisbeth and Jumbles came to that distinguished and dignified ash tree which stands where a bridle path meets the broad highway, as it has stood this century or two. A squirrel, red as a hero's beard, flashed up the tree. Lifting their eyes to follow the squirrel's

scolding flight they saw the massive shield that swung from a branch above the path. The shield was tall as Lisbeth's chin, and round its circumference it was bossed with bright gold. The surface of the shield was azure, and thereon frowned the likeness of a grim head, swarthy, infuriate, with thin, bleak lips twisted to a semi-snarl. One looked twice to perceive a proud nobility beneath that painted rage. And a legend was on the shield, neatly lettered, though it was wrought in the difficult old text that is found on Christmas cards. Lisbeth started back at sight of the grim countenance but her glance ranged the legend while Jumbles slowly spelled it out. And the words were:

**Then smite me, an thou
darest**

“With what?” asked Jumbles. “And why?”

“Well, with that, I suppose,” answered Lisbeth, and she pointed to the foot of the ash, where rested a very remarkable bludgeon or club, fashioned of dark wood, its handle polished as by long service, its bulging extremity lovingly studded with triangular steel protuberances, as though strange nails had been driven into it by pattern.

“But why one should smite it,” she said, “I’m sure I cannot imagine.” Her eyes were dancing, however, with

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the beginnings of a most lively curiosity. Why should one strike the shield? And what would happen if one did? But it seemed the shield must often have been so treated, for it bore many a dint and scar and slash, shrewdly given.

“That thing is a war club of some kind,” remarked Jumbles, contemplating the mace with respectful interest. “Gosh, what a thump you could give a fellow with it!” He made no move to take up the mace, and—to do him justice—the truth is he was thinking largely of Lisbeth. Only to fancy such a face as that upon the shield, with furious trunk and limbs appropriate, advancing down the bridle path. It was in his thought that one might strike the shield, and drop the mace, and watch for a moment—and then run, if need be. But a girl would falter. Lisbeth might stumble.

“Aren’t you going to strike it, Jumbles?” inquired Lisbeth, in an odd little voice that trembled somewhat, ending in thrilled, nervous laughter.

“No, I’m not,” said Jumbles stoutly, though his heart was troubled. “If we waste time like this, Lisbeth, we’ll never be getting anywhere. Come on. It’s only some kind of a joke.”

“You’re sure you won’t, Jumbles?” persisted Lisbeth.

“No!” he exclaimed almost fiercely. “No, I said!”

“Well, then—” laughed Lisbeth queerly.

“Don’t!” cried Jumbles, springing toward her.

But she had gripped the weapon and lifted it waveringly, for it was heavy almost as metal. Before his hand might stay her from her purpose, the mace clanged fairly against the pictured countenance. And the descent of the mace, for truly it fell rather than was driven, wrested the weapon from her grasp and cast it to the sod.

“Bong!”

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The deep, resonant voice of the stricken shield rang bell-like through the forest, away and away. In the silence they heard their own laboring hearts. Nothing happened on the moment. And they had begun to smile gleefully at one another, as though to say they had been certain nothing would happen, when they heard a young voice humming an air quite strange to them, and loitering down the pathway came an elegant, slim youth, who seemed to have been poured into purple velvet. There was a silver chain at his throat, and a silver belt at his waist, and the silver handle of a poniard at his hip. The jauntiness of his purple cap was quite remarkable, as was the blithe assurance of his manner. Golden ringlets dangled to his collar, and his face was fresh and smiling as a May morning. As he approached them he raised a white hand in greeting, and called out cheerily.

“Greetings, dear Lady!” he cried to Lisbeth, who scarce could believe her ears, thus to be addressed. And to Jumbles, “How now, Messire? Art a bold heart and brave so to buffet my master’s shield that was with him in Palestine!”

He was standing before them with velvet arms akimbo, the veined whiteness of his slender hands resting against the purple of his rich attire. One is sure that Lisbeth will be forgiven her momentary, swift thought—for he was most agreeable to look upon. And the form and substance of her thought was this—that there is no harm whatever in the striking of shields.

“Then it isn’t your shield?” asked Jumbles, measuring the velvet one appraisingly, but liking him well for all that.

“My shield!” trilled the youth. “Nay, for I have no shield of mine own. My shield and my knighthood are yet to win, by God’s grace, when I have ridden to battle. Dost not know the shield of my master? Whence come

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ye, that his device seemeth strange to thee? An ye had been at the intaking of Nicaea, ye would not put this question. Or yet at Antioch when yonder shield was lifted in right joyous battle. An had ye been, Messire, beside my master on that day his charger dipped the very stirrups in Saracen blood, ye would doff cap to that shield. Why, certes, it was in my thought that all the world was well aware of his device, and how he gained it. An had ye been —”

“Yes, I know,” said Jumbles, rather impatiently. “He seems to have been around quite a bit. But since we don’t know whose shield it is, I think you might tell us.”

“My master is hight Sir Marmaduke of the Moor!” replied the velvet one, and there was a deal of pride, and much of true affection, in the words. “And yonder shield, which ye have smitten, is his own.”

“You’re mistaken in thinking that Jumbles struck it,” explained Lisbeth. “You see, he didn’t strike it at all. I did.”

“How now!” exclaimed the youth, in evident bewilderment. “Prithee, what most unmaidenly behavior is this? Dost thou speak truly? Didst smite the shield of Marmaduke?”

“You seem to be making a lot of fuss about it,” remarked Jumbles, an edge to his voice. “Yes, she banged your old shield, but I’m responsible. Want to see her thump it again?”

“Now, Jumbles,” said Lisbeth soothingly.

“Nathless, it was not well bethought,” insisted the youth. “But since thou sayst—”

“Sure,” said Jumbles.

“Why, then, Messire, belike ’twill serve.” He smiled generously upon them. “Nay, I shall lead thee to a very blithe adventuring. Come!”

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Lisbeth looked at Jumbles, and he at Lisbeth. He saw, with a resignation not wholly unwelcome, that nothing less would content her. They must follow, for a time at least, whither the youth led. And Jumbles, for his part, was by no means incurious as to the nature of this Sir Marmaduke, who

seemed to have traveled so widely, and whose servitor was so divertingly unusual. He put the question to Lisbeth with a look.

“Oh, let’s!” she said happily. And the three went down the bridle path, the youth in purple satin bearing the shield away with him.

“I am hight Cuthbert,” he volunteered.

Now Jumbles had marked this word, you scarce need be told which, in their earlier parley, and it troubled him. And when anything troubled Jumbles he must out with it.

“You mean that your name is Cuthbert,” said Jumbles, with ill-concealed distaste. He didn’t entirely approve of the name. “But what’s that got to do with how tall you are?”

“Certes, it hath naught to do with that matter,” answered Cuthbert, as plainly at loss as was his questioner. “I did but say, I am hight Cuthbert.”

Jumbles caught Lisbeth’s eye, and placed a forefinger to his temple. He meant to say it was sadly evident that Cuthbert, for all his sprightly humor, was not quite himself. And he vowed, with a warmth of pity for such a plight, thereafter to be more tolerant of the youth.

“But I shall call you Bertie!” Lisbeth promised brightly.

Cuthbert paused, gaped, winced, and went forward. He had the look of one who almost has been betrayed to hasty speech.

“Bertie!” observed Jumbles to himself. “This Cuthbert,

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then,” reflected Jumbles, “however clouded his youthful mind may be, is at heart a gentleman and really brave.”

Very soon they came to a small field in the forest. Around it were clustered nun-gray alders and red-stemmed willows, through which the bluest of bluejays were winging and screaming. A callow and joyous brook traversed that pleasant sod, pausing to loiter in prim little eddies where tiny trout parr leaped to the capture of gnats, and chattering with eagerness as its pace quickened. Beside the stream, the bulk of him huge against a willow, was seated an elderly knight in armor, helmet and gauntlets doffed, sword and lance at rest in the turf. With a patience strange to see in one so attired, and of such ample hands, the knight was busied at the wrapping of a fishing-rod. His deftness was astonishing, and his affection no less evident, as he twirled the silken floss around the light wood. He glanced now and then at the brook, during this employment, or squinted anxiously at the sky—and a genial, cheerful picture he made of shimmering steel and gentle

avocation. Cuthbert pursed his lips in warning, and placed finger to them, for as those three approached the knight he was in the act of drawing the silk-end beneath its wrapping, which anyone that ever wrapped a fishing-rod will tell you is a task not suited to interruption. But, this finished, the knight looked up at them quite jovially.

“There!” he exclaimed with satisfaction.

Lisbeth thought him, though never before had she seen a knight at arms, altogether the finest and knightliest knight in Christendom—with his drooping gray mustaches, his gray head that was gleamingly tonsured by baldness, the weal of an old scar on his cheek, his tufted gray eyebrows, and his fierce but amiable eyes—that were not unlike the eyes of some tremendous and

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trustworthy mastiff. To Jumbles the glitter and clink of his armor were of more moment than all the history lessons that ever were given.

“An it please thee, Sir Marmaduke,” said Cuthbert, “here be twain that have ventured hither for thy acquaintance.”

He made them known to Sir Marmaduke of the Moor, who proved indeed, to be a jovial, loquacious, avuncular person, with a firm belief that the brook secreted, somewhere in that very meadow, a trout of girth and substance, a trout of glory and valor.

“Certes, the fish waiteth yonder!” Sir Marmaduke declared. “He hath vexed my deepest slumber, Messire, with his flounderings and his leapings. Meseems this day surely shall discover him to my hackle. Meantime I tarry. Dost angle?”

“I haven’t had a chance to, so far,” replied Jumbles. “Is it fun to catch a trout?”

“How now!” cried the knight with surprise. “Hast never cast a line in any goodly water? It will be passing hard to tell thee, an thou hast not, what manner of joyousness is yet to be thine. So dear to the heart is this blithe disport that almost I desire it above battle and tourney.”

“Excuse me, Sir Marmaduke,” ventured Mary Elizabeth, “but do you mean that you wouldn’t rather catch trout than have a battle? Really? Why, goodness, I should think anybody would.”

Then the knight shook the forest with his laughter, until he was quite red in the face, while Cuthbert won a frown from Lisbeth because of the way he smiled at her.

“How think you, an I had not a stronger stomach for battle, I came to be hight Sir Marmaduke of the Moor?” the old knight asked at an end of laughter.

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“I suppose you own a moor somewhere,” answered Lisbeth, “and so they call you by that name.”

“And a moor, prithee?” he persisted.

“It’s a kind of meadow, or pasture, I’ve always thought,” answered Lisbeth, “though, of course, it has to be lonely as everything. It’s lonelier than a pasture, I think, and that’s the difference.”

“And the wind blows over it,” Jumbles added. “And there’s an old quarry with water in it, nobody knows how deep. And sometimes it’s haunted.”

“Grammercy for thine innocence!” exclaimed Sir Marmaduke. “Thine is but the one sort of moor. By the golden harness of Michael! It was not so that I won this name!”

“Well, how did you?” asked Jumbles.

Of a sudden the knight was transfigured by emotion. There came to his face a new deepness of line, a sternness of lip, a chillness of eye, and on his cheek the old wound woke to blaze. He seemed scarcely to see them as he spoke.

“Wouldst know?” he cried, and lifted high his clenched and corded hands. “Never was paynim warrior worthier of Christian blade. Ho! this Saracen was death’s self as he rode toward me, while yet my spurs were bright. Sir Hubert of the Grove was cast down at his onslaught, sorely smitten. Sir Charles of the Scarlet Stag lay weltering in his heart’s blood. Seven archers had he slain, this paynim knight, and fear rode with him. Splendor of Paradise! An he had been my comrade-at-arms, how dearly must I have held him. In what knightly fondness! Thus we were met, thigh to thigh, breast to breast, in the press of battle. Certes, he left me not without scath, but I—”

The knight’s voice had increased to a ringing, roaring breathlessness, and he had half risen. His features

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were working with a dark, lambent emotion. And could he be—thought Lisbeth—the same who but a few moments since had tied a silken floss

upon a fishing-rod?

“Yes, Sir Marmaduke,” whispered Cuthbert, on whose boyish face was a curious sharp hunger. (Neither Lisbeth nor Jumbles would have prompted the knight.) “But you, Sir Marmaduke?” whispered Cuthbert.

“By God’s grace!” cried Sir Marmaduke, “I clove him from the brow to the saddle! That very knightly paynim! An ye had been there, Messire, ye would have heard the great shout of my comrades whenas the Moorish champion fell from his stallion—so—to either hand! Dost know now why men have called me Marmaduke of the Moor?”

“And that?” gasped Lisbeth with a shudder, pointing at the swart face on the azure shield.

“Pardee, it lacks for something which the heart desireth,” said Sir Marmaduke, studying the scowling portrait of his enemy. “How now! Meseems one would have more of truth from these artist knaves than they have ever to sell. He was of comelier visage and nobler bearing. Yet it is not unlike the Moor.”

At a gesture from Sir Marmaduke, whose face was again kindly, they seated themselves beside him on the turf. And from somewhere came a little she-dog, all silken, that rested against the knight’s mailed thigh and looked up at him with round, trustful eyes of love. When they asked what kind of dog she was, the knight answered that she was a brachet of the best breed, unsurpassed for the driving of hares.

“Eh, Margot?” the knight teased her, gently twisting a limp, black ear between thumb and finger. “Wouldst up and away with me to start a brown hare from his bracken? A brown hare for the spit, lass?” The she-dog trembled delicately, as though chilled, and

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searched the fringe of the forest with quick glance. Whereat the knight seized her in his two great hands, pressed his cheek against her glossy pelt, tossed her high in air, caught her as she sprawled downward, and set her at his side once more. The dog smiled at him, pink tongue lolling, and he at her. And Jumbles thought it would go ill with anyone that harmed her.

“I think we’re very fortunate to find a real knight in armor here in this forest,” said Lisbeth with sincerity. “It’s so much more interesting than merely reading of one.”

“That is as may be, damsel,” answered the old knight. “In sooth thou mightest have chanced upon me anywhere, for I am a knight errant

nowadays.”

“I know,” said Jumbles. “You ride about looking for adventure and righting wrongs, and rescuing maidens in distress, and all that sort of thing.”

“So have I ridden since ever the Crusades were at an end,” replied the knight. “Nathless, I must soon put by my lance, for knight errantry nowadays requireth a longer purse than that of Marmaduke. Ah, the silver shillings this Cuthbert of mine doth cost me! And he but a part of the outlay.”

He looked so woeful as he said this that Lisbeth judged it best to change the subject.

“When you rode in the Crusades,” said she, “what was the most marvelous thing you experienced?”

“Now by my hilt!” exclaimed Sir Marmaduke. “Maiden, thou hast restored mine olden grievance! My most marvelous experience was the quite sinful cost of oats. What mettle waketh in a charger unless it be so fired? Thou mayst widen thine eyes in wonder, but I tell thee straightly that a measure of oats in need hath the worth of a yeoman’s life. An ever thou ridest on a crusade, Messire,” said the old knight, turning to Jumbles,

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“take thine own oats with thee, and of these in plenty.”

You may be certain that Jumbles was roused to even greater interest by this mention of oats, and of their value to horses. He knew a hundred questions to put, but voiced the first that popped into his head.

“You grew good oats in England, didn’t you?” he asked.

“Certes, you speak but sooth,” replied the old knight. “The comeliest, plumpest oats that ever these eyes beheld were grown on an English acre. Hodgkins, me-seems the fellow was hight, he that grew them. They were of a new sort. Some said ’twas by enchantment, for never before had such oats been seen in all the realm of Britain. Alack, that they were lost to Christendom!”

“Lost!” echoed Jumbles.

“Yea, verily,” sighed the old knight. “Wit ye well that not so much as one oat remained to furnish seed.”

“But how?” persisted Jumbles, deeply troubled.

“Marry, the tale is of the simplest,” answered Sir Marmaduke. “This Hodgkins—or was he hight Hedges?—a small matter—in any case, the

fellow insolently refused to yield the highroad to the noble Duke of Umber. And so the oats were lost. Ah, me.”

“Still I don’t understand,” said Jumbles.

“How now!” exclaimed Sir Marmaduke in surprise. “What lacketh? It is true there was mire in the ditch, but the highroad was the Duke’s, an he wished it. ’Tis plain enough. At worst the fellow had but overturned his wain—an he had yielded as he should, as was but lawful.”

“But still I fail to see—” began Jumbles.

“Dost not?” repeated the old knight, his eyes round with wonder. “Why, Messire, what then remained for the Duke of Umber, save to lash the fellow’s scowl

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away with his dog whip, and bid his yeomen toss this Hodgkins into that same mire he so delicately shunned? Wherefore, ’twas gently done, and his ears cropped in good season, and his lands taken from him, and his oats seized as forfeit to the good and clement Duke. At what a cost to Britain did the knave assert his insolence!”

“I think it was shameful!” cried Lisbeth, while on Jumbles’ cheek a flush reddened darkly.

“So do I,” said Jumbles. “And the Duke got the oats, did he? What did he do with them?”

“In sooth, he did but that which thou wouldst do, or I,” responded Sir Marmaduke. “The oats were taken to his stables, for the refreshment of his own steed.”

“And none of them were planted?” pursued Jumbles.

“How strangely thou speakest!” cried the knight, with some slight petulance. “Dost think the Duke of Umber deigns to till the glebe? The oats were forfeit, Messire.”

“But the Duke might have planted a few,” ventured Lisbeth.

“Nay, that was this Hodgkins’s affair,” explained the old knight patiently.

“And so the oats were lost,” mused Jumbles.

“It was the Duke’s fault that they were,” declared Lisbeth.

“Not so,” said Sir Marmaduke with evident finality. “But for the insolence of Hodgkins the oats would flourish to this day.”

Now Jumbles would have spoken further, for the glow on his cheek yet was dark, had not Lisbeth turned the talk to another channel.

“When you have to quit being a knight errant,” she said, “what will you do, Sir Marmaduke?”

“’Tis a matter that hath vexed me often,” answered the old knight. “Yet I have thought it not unknighly

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were I to journey in far countries, there to instruct the outlanders in the excellence of Britain. What sayest thou?”

“You mean that you may lecture?” asked Lisbeth.

“An that be thy word for it,” answered the old knight.

“I guess lots of them do,” said Jumbles. “They get paid mighty well, too.”

Sir Marmaduke seemed well pleased at this assurance, and for some moments pursued his own thoughts. Very slowly the flush departed from Jumbles’ cheek, while Lisbeth yet grieved for Hodgkins—homeless, oatless, earless, wandering over a friendless land.

“Can it be sooth that the wind shapeth southward?” asked the knight presently, though the air seemed without motion. He was studying the clouds.

Jumbles rolled to his back and studied the clouds also, for his was the true masculine interest in any portent of weather. It was evident that the few fleeces above them trended from the south, but the clouds were far removed from earth.

“I can’t just say,” replied Jumbles carefully. “They’re so high. Seems like it might be going to.”

“I’m sure the wind will be from the south,” said Mary Elizabeth. “If there is a wind,” she added.

“Prithee, why?” said the knight, as though much depended on the answer.

“Because it smells like a south wind,” she said. “Now, doesn’t it?”

“Certes, it hath that very odor!” exclaimed the knight happily.

“Of a truth it hath!” agreed Cuthbert.

All four of them were sniffing, their eyes widened with the effort, their noses wrinkled, to determine what manner of wind might presently stir the meadow. Yes,

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to be sure, the remnant of the morning had the sweet odor, the balminess, of the south wind—or at least a presage of it.

“And if there is a south wind?” suggested Jumbles.

“How now!” replied Sir Marmaduke. “Of a truth, I failed to recall thou art not a brother of the angle. An the wind shapes from the south, my trout will be rising soon.” He stretched out a hand for the fishing-rod. But Cuthbert stayed him with respectful gesture.

“Messire,” said Cuthbert, “hast forgotten why this very gallant friend is come to thee?”

Jumbles and Lisbeth stared at one another, but it was he who voiced their thought.

“Why we came, you should say,” corrected Jumbles. “I guess that’s what we’d like to know, too. We just came; just sort of came.” He eyed Cuthbert accusingly. “But you asked us.”

“Now by my faith!” boomed Sir Marmaduke, paying Jumbles not the least attention. “I had indeed forgotten. Thou mayst call me witless an thou wilt! He smote the shield!”

“And bravely done,” agreed Cuthbert nodding his head solemnly. “He smote the shield of Marmaduke.”

Sir Marmaduke leaped to his feet with surprising agility, for one so well along in years, so burdened with armor, clapping his huge hands briskly. His look was toward the forest.

“Prithee, Messire, thy forgiveness for an old knight’s discourtesy,” he begged the bewildered Jumbles, and clapped his hands again.



CHAPTER XII.

Revealing the sensations of one who must perforce engage in a jousting.—Of the conflict that ensued between Jumbles and Sir Marmaduke.—In which the former was brought near to mortal peril.—And of the slim blade that was drawn no moment too soon.—The amazement of Marmaduke.



OUT of the forest there came, through the nun-gray alders and the red willow, three maidens beautiful to see. One was clad in samite of emerald, and she was laden with bright armor. One was clad in samite of scarlet, and she carried a shield without device. And one was clad in samite of sheerest white, and she bore a tall sword and ashen lance. The three maidens walked slowly for their burdens were heavy. They came toward the waiting four, and without word laid the war-gear on the sod. Then the knight whistled thrice and from the forest issued two mighty stallions, thewed for the plow, yet saddled and bridled, with massive necks proudly arched, with broad hooves scoring the meadow. The one was dark as the wing of the raven. The other was golden as a king's

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coin. Without haste the stallions came toward them and at the distance of a pace fell to cropping the grass. Sir Marmaduke rubbed his hands with evident pleasure.

“Messire,” he said to Jumbles, “arm thyself.”

“But—” began Jumbles. And the three maidens, smiling prettily, yet saying never a word, were at him with the armor. The helmet plumped

heavily over his head, stifling his protests. Their hands were practiced. He was a mailed knight in a twinkling.

“You stop!” cried Lisbeth, but the evident astonishment of the three maidens dissuaded her from her purpose, which had been to fly at them fiercely. She began softly to weep. As for Sir Marmaduke of the Moor, his helm was already on his head, his gauntlets donned, and Cuthbert was boosting him into the saddle of the black stallion. Through lifted visor his merry old eyes were reassuring. There stood Jumbles, in armor that sagged somewhat—if armor ever may sag—rather ludicrous, and not a little pitiful, to behold. The damsel in emerald samite was belting the war-sword at his waist.

“No!” cried Jumbles in a muffled voice. “Give me mine!” A great fear was in his heart, for he realized that one of the three maidens had taken away the comfort of the slim blade that had been his ever since the adventure of the dragon.

“An thou wilt,” said Sir Marmaduke graciously. “A knight or squire may always choose his arms.”

Mary Elizabeth was even then at Jumbles’ side, nor did the three maidens venture to prevent. With trembling fingers she buckled on the worn familiar belt, bearing its slender steel in the green scabbard.

Almost before Jumbles knew it he was astride the golden stallion, clanking and clattering in the great war saddle, the heavy lance borne inexpertly in his right hand, his left gripping the reins, the shield jouncing.

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And the stallion, as a charger that knew its business, withdrew at a pounding gallop to the farther side of the meadow, wheeled ponderously and threw up its handsome head to neigh. Through the slits in his visor, Jumbles saw Sir Marmaduke facing him, mighty against the distant willows, bright armor and black stallion all a-glitter; saw the old knight lower his lance, the war-steed bow its massive neck, the lunge of departure. There was a thunder of hooves in his ears, a whistle of wind about his helm, a pulse beating at his temples. And he realized, for Sir Marmaduke glittered ever larger and larger, that the golden stallion also was rushing forward to the encounter. He held his own lance as best he might, for there was naught else to do. Somehow he contrived both to manage his mount after a fashion and to swing the shield before him. For his charger seemed to know all that was required of it, and strode evenly along the course. The

lance in the hand of Sir Marmaduke was dreadfully foreshortened. The plume of Sir Marmaduke's helmet streamed to the wind. The scowling visage on the old knight's shield seemed almost to be thrown upon him. In the fraction of a moment he must surely be impaled. Ah, Lisbeth! Her cry was thin with terror.

But on that fateful instant the golden stallion swerved, the lance tip of Sir Marmaduke rang gratingly upon Jumbles' mailed shoulder, and a round turf up-tossed by the black charger's hoof soared darkly before his eyes. In the space of moments he was at the other end of the lists, his golden mount had wheeled again, and once more he perceived Sir Marmaduke with leveled lance, all motionless and dread. He would have cried out to end the desperate play, but the muscles of his stallion bulged beneath him and his helmet sang with the wind of the charge. This time he thought surely

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to quit his life somewhere on the sward beside the brook. But he bore his lance stoutly and to such purpose that it shore away a plate from the armor of the old knight. Yet as he felt his steel strike gloriously home, he was himself smitten almost to insensibility, and thrust from the saddle in a white blaze of shock. The pierced shield fell from him as he was cast down. He saw the pounding hooves of the black charger pass over him. And through his visor he gaped dizzily at the sky.

Now the old knight reined his charger to a halt, and himself alighted, lifting his great blade briskly from its sheath. He strode toward the fallen Jumbles, and as he did so Mary Elizabeth cried out and would have rushed forward, but the three maidens held her gently and with chidings. Then Jumbles, hearing that pitiful cry, raised slowly to an elbow and perceived Sir Marmaduke advancing with lifted blade. His senses returned to him in some measure, and his thought was that it would be very queer to lie there presently, even as the Moor had lain him down in Palestine.

"Now yield thee, Messire!" the old knight called to him.

And Jumbles laughed. Laughing he rose to his knees, though with an effort that cost him much, and laughing he snatched the lean sword from its scabbard. All on an instant it came to him, as though the truth had waited some secret touchstone of revelation, that it was most amusing so to be arrayed against Sir Marmaduke, a fiction strayed far from his century, and that doubtless there were worse deaths to die, and that—so sure as you were born—the old knight could not be better than mortal. He laughed

without anger or ill will, and so laughing he met his adversary more than midway. Sparks were shed from their encountering steel. Yet strangely, though the heavier weapon and greater skill

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of Sir Marmaduke should soon have overwhelmed the boy, it was the old knight who gave ground, fighting ever on the defensive. And it was the old knight's sword that presently rose in a shining arc as, half stumbling, half overborne by a shrewd blow, Sir Marmaduke fell to the sward with a tremendous din of iron-mongery. Once fallen he lay very still.

"Now yield thee, Marmaduke!" cried Jumbles in his turn.

"Yea, blithely," answered the old knight, "an thou sparest me."

Cuthbert, the three maidens and Lisbeth were round them then, and the youth lifted his master to stand and helped him doff his helmet. Sir Marmaduke's face was reddened, and his breath came puffingly, but he was in great good humor.

"How now, Messire!" he exclaimed. "By the golden harness of Michael! Whenas you laid me low I nerved myself for the stroke of thy misericorde."

"My what?" asked Tumbles, whose helm also was doffed.

"Thy misericorde," repeated Cuthbert, pointing to the narrow poniard that dangled from Jumbles' armor, and which he had not noted. Then, seeing the wonderment in Jumbles' eyes, Cuthbert added: "That dagger, Messire, is thine instrument for the dispatching of a fallen knight."

"Certes," added Sir Marmaduke, smiling broadly, and gesturing with one heavy hand. "The stroke is given thusly, through the visor and into the wit itself. Many a brave knight hath found himself in paradise by such means."

"To strike him when he is down!" cried Jumbles with horror.

"When else, an it be the misericorde that is employed?"

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"Now yield thee, Marmaduke!"

said Sir Marmaduke, with some astonishment. "Moreover, it is an olden usage of our chivalry. Messire, have I leave to grip thy blade? By the Cross! Saw I never such a sword as that in any fray or jousting. 'Tis like a dame's needle. What smith was thine?"

Jumbles extended his sword to the old knight, who took it eagerly, lovingly, in his hands, scanning it from hilt to tip.

"It was given to me," said the boy. "I do not know who made it."

Sir Marmaduke raised a strange face to him from the slim sword. There was awe in that look, and something near of kin to fear, and sad bafflement, and regret deep as dark waters. And Lisbeth and Jumbles, watching him, perceived that he knew the steel.

“Knowest thou not whose blade is thine?” asked the old knight slowly.
“No longer do I marvel at thy feat of arms, thou beardless boy. This is the sword of Cervantes!”





CHAPTER XIII.

Which narrates the beginning of a disagreement about nothing whatever.—And tells of how it was mended.—Touching also upon the recitation of verses.—And of the failure of Jumbles to return.—How Lisbeth watched through the long night.—And of the creature that guarded her.

ON parting from Sir Marmaduke—to whom they said their farewells with reluctance—the travelers had been given a small wheaten loaf, which the old knight insisted on calling “a manchet of white bread,” the term greatly perplexing them. But now, seated beside the highway, where it curved abruptly round a sharp cliff softened with mosses, they found the loaf to be worthy of their brisk appetites. The crust was brown and crackling. The inside of the loaf was moist and delectable. While as for drink, there trickled down the cliff, with soft splashings, tracing its course over a narrow, rambling channel of bared gray rock, the coolest and sweetest of infant waterfalls. Maidenhair fern had found lodgement along the course of descent, and to one hand of the small pool formed by the flow there grew a single plant of that

fragile, shy spring-lover that is called jewel-weed. Outward from the pool and to the verge of the cobblestones was spread an area of good green turf, in which many dandelions were opened to their lord the sun. When they had eaten all the loaf, to the last crumb, and had pursed their lips full several times to the coolness of the pool, Lisbeth and Jumbles lay on the sod in the sunshine and talked or were silent. It was getting on toward mid-afternoon, but they seemed now to be in no haste whatever. Nor will this

indisposition pass unrecognized of any traveler, wheresoever he may be—for a wheaten loaf, a pool of chill water, and a patch of cushioned sod, are these not all that one may immediately require of his wayfaring?

“What is that plant, Lisbeth?” asked Jumbles idly, indicating the golden, trembling flower by the pool.

“What plant?” repeated Lisbeth. “Oh, that! Why, that’s jewel-weed, of course. It grows everywhere around Horsefoot. It’s much too pretty to be called a weed.”

“I suppose so,” agreed Jumbles, “though if it is a weed, there’s no helping it. It’s only a weed, no matter how pretty it may look.”

Mary Elizabeth knit her forehead to hear this, and for half a moment it seemed as though she held views of her own on weeds, and might impart them. But instead she plucked a dandelion, of the score within reach, snipped the blossom off, and blew a vibrant, throaty trumpet tone from the stem. So there was naught for Jumbles to do, you must concede, save to pick another dandelion, and snip off its head, and blow a blast to shame the effort of any girl. And, beaten in this, Lisbeth took up the forging of a linked chain of dandelion stems, with here and there a blossom interwoven, to

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which occupation Jumbles generously lent his aid and no small measure of advice.

“And they’re weeds, too,” he mused aloud, when the chain was arm-length.

“James Christopher,” said Lisbeth severely, “I can’t understand why you are so positive about weeds. Aren’t dandelions beautiful enough to be called something else? Isn’t that jewel-weed beautiful enough?”

“But we aren’t talking about the jewel-weed,” replied Jumbles, with perhaps a trace of masculine superiority. “That was quite a while ago. We’re talking about dandelions now. And everybody knows that dandelions are weeds.”

“Do they so?” exclaimed Lisbeth. “Just what is a weed, Mister Jumbles?”

Now the prefix should have warned him, but Jumbles had a sometimes troublesome directness of mind, and therefore of speech, that took small note of such omens. And dandelions were weeds, of course, as all the worried gardeners of the whole world knew.

“That’s easy,” he replied lightly. “A weed is something you don’t want in your garden or your lawn. That’s a weed.”

“Then our Old Susie is a weed, I imagine,” retorted Lisbeth, well knowing that she was unfair. But Jumbles smiled at her, in a most irritating way.

“All foolishness,” he said, “and you know it. Perhaps you’ll tell me what is a weed.”

“There’s no perhaps about it,” she answered with increasing sharpness. But her voice softened as she said slowly, “A weed, I think, is only a plant or a flower we haven’t learned to love or find a use for.”

“Well, that’s because they’re weeds!” chuckled Jumbles.

“No it isn’t! It isn’t, either! It’s because we are stupid.

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All the garden plants were weeds before we knew they weren’t. Doesn’t the first dandelion in spring make you want to stoop down and kiss it? If you love anything it can’t be a weed.”

“Catch me kissing any old dandelion,” scoffed Jumbles.

“But you’re glad when the first one comes, aren’t you?” she insisted.

“Oh, yes, I suppose I am.”

“Well, then,” remarked Lisbeth, as one who has more than proved her point. And Jumbles should have desisted, but this he could not know—being Jumbles.

“That’s nothing to do with it,” he resumed, and tossed her another stem for the chain.

“It hasn’t?” she inquired, and the question was roundly incredulous, partaking somewhat of the nature of an exclamation. She threw the chain away almost angrily.

“I can’t see that it has,” said Jumbles, gazing blandly at the sky.

“Well, let me tell you something, Mister Jumbles,” exclaimed Lisbeth. “I’m sure I don’t care what you think about weeds or flowers! I think you’re unkind, I do! I think . .

But utterance failed her, and she began to weep, with little quiverings of breath. And she had hidden her face in her hands. The astounded Jumbles sat bolt upright and regarded her with unfeigned astonishment. A perplexity that is old as the race came into his eyes—and this is in part grief, and in part impatience, and in part it is something else, something planetary and infinite.

“Why, Lisbeth!” he chided in a low voice, and outstretched a hand toward the brown softness of her hair. “Why, Mary Elizabeth!” he comforted, as one would comfort a child, and withdrew the hand. “Lisbeth!” he

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urged again, and this time his hand was clumsily stroking her hair. “Look at me, Lisbeth.” Then she lifted her face to him, the gray eyes all damp with hurt, and his was the guilt of one that has stoned a bird—though goodness knows he was sore at loss to understand why he should feel so. And the wet grayness of her eyes searched his look, and there was nothing for it save to say that which must be said.

“Lisbeth, I’m sorry,” vowed Jumbles contritely. “A dandelion is a flower.”

“Oh, no it isn’t exactly,” replied Lisbeth generously. “Yes, it is,” he answered positively.

“No, it isn’t.”

At this, both were overtaken by laughter, and she reached for the chain again and they resumed their labor—to forge, link by green link, that which is without permanency, by every rule of logic, that which withers and passes, yet must ever remain. And Jumbles made a promise to himself—thrice in his thought he made it—which he was to break before the chain was finished. But how was Jumbles to know? Or, knowing, how might he then defend himself against that which has been the undoing of many vows? For presently he thought there was a mocking light in Lisbeth’s eyes, and when she knew that he felt this, when she was certain, she looked so drolly, mischievously aware of a secret jest, that barbs entered his spirit and he spoke.

“What are you grinning at?” he asked rudely, only to be chagrined at the roughness of his tone.

“Oh, nothing,” said Lisbeth—but now there were small restless flames of quite evident mockery dancing in her gaze.

“It’s something,” he said, his face reddening. “You’d better tell me, too.”

“It isn’t anything, Jumbles,” answered Lisbeth. “That

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is, it isn’t anything much. I was only thinking how funny you looked in that ridiculous armor, bouncing and clattering up and down. My goodness! Oh,

gracious! You—looked so—funny!” The tears on her cheek were tears of joyous mirth, and she was breathless with laughter.

There is none of us knows just why Lisbeth laughed at that particular time, when Jumbles had so handsomely yielded the argument about weeds and flowers—and, indeed, it was perhaps the least propitious of all moments for laughter at Jumbles’ expense. Jumbles couldn’t know why she laughed. And Lisbeth didn’t know, not really. And Professor What’s-his-name wouldn’t have known had they asked him. And Uncle Henry would have been much at loss to riddle it. And Aunt Emma wouldn’t have known—although she would have sympathized. With Jumbles? No, indeed. With Lisbeth, as a matter of course. Perhaps the Dark Woman knows, but of her and her knowledge we know so very little that there would be no way to get at this specific and somewhat unimportant question. In any event, Mary Elizabeth laughed not with but at her companion—and, one gravely fears, with something of lightest malice in her merriment.

And Jumbles? Well, when one has ridden into battle or tourney for one’s first time, and has thought to feel the iron thrust through one’s midriff, and so to quit this pleasant world before the stars are out, the cup quaffed, the road traveled, and has so amazingly borne oneself as to emerge with life and honor—and all this unselfishly and for another—one does not relish such laughter. Nor did Jumbles. It prevails where lances may not, and it wounds where blades are without authority to harm. Couldn’t she know? Was it possible she was unaware of that dignity which may be tenant to a garb

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uncouth? That bright and selfless resolve which often rides toward scath and mortal hurt in the trappings of ridicule? Then there only remained the leave-taking. And Jumbles rose to his feet on the little green sward beneath the green cliff. And she rose, too, facing him, and the smile on her lips was persistent though alarmed.

“Goodby, Mary Elizabeth,” said Jumbles very quietly.

“Goodby, James Christopher,” said Mary Elizabeth lightly, but the words sounded strange and false to her ears.

And Jumbles turned back along the highway. He had but to step round the jutting cliff—and he was gone. Then Lisbeth, still smiling, walked slowly forward. And she had but to step round the jutting cliff—and she was gone. The chain they had forged of flower stems lay on the sod they

had quitted. And Lisbeth ceased to smile, since—with none to witness—there was no longer any need. She listened. But he did not call. She loitered. But he did not come hastening after her. And it came to her that she had nothing of her friend, save only her memories—and that she wasn't ever going to see him any more, and that presently she would stand, sighing beside Horsefoot, in the forest of Back Beyond. Hers was the hunger for a keepsake. And she turned back for the chain. Yes, back for the chain.

In an instant, it seemed no more than that, she stood again at the cheek of the cliff, at the edge of the sward, and blindly she passed round the turn and bent to the turf. Now it challenges belief to assert that which actually befell, but the fact is, as she reached for the chain, she perceived another hand stretched toward it—and the hand was that of Jumbles. Very slowly she raised her eyes to his, and for a long moment they regarded one another—without reproach, without upbraidings,

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and gradually there was gladness in their eyes, and comprehension.

“Jumbles, I'm horrid,” said Lisbeth.

“You're not!” he protested.

After this they said no more about it, as was best, but began to speak of the oncoming of night, and of the uncertainty of lodgings. They were agreed that fortune could not reasonably be expected to present them with another Mr. Gaffney, nor yet a Certified Public Accountant, not to speak of the hateful hospitality of the Cockaignese. Indeed, they were at their wit's end, and even considered turning back to the encampment of Sir Marmaduke, and should have done so had they not reflected that he was a knight errant and as such might be almost anywhere by that time. The shadows lengthened as they talked, and the treetops took up a leafy gossiping of the twilight that is descried afar from treetops. There was a faint, mournful mystery as of evening in the air.

But they were not to be fretted for any length of time by their problem, since all the evening was yet before them. And they put the matter conveniently aside, and fell to speaking of other things.

“Do you know what I miss, Jumbles?” asked the girl.

“I give it up,” said the boy idly.

“It's candy,” confessed Lisbeth.

“After that time in Cockaigne?” said Jumbles incredulously. He reflected for a moment. “Come to think of it, I suppose I miss it, too. Isn't it

funny that when you have all you want of everything you don't want it, and when you haven't it, why then, you want it ever so much?"

"There's nothing so extraordinary about that," interrupted a third voice, quite strange to them. "I've noticed it myself. Everybody has."

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They hadn't seen him approach them, but there he stood—a rather pompous, portly man, whose waistcoat bulged, whose cheeks were ruddy with good living, and who did not—for all that he must have walked the highway—show a single travel stain nor speck of dust. They weren't in the least startled, because, you see, there wasn't anything startling about him.

"I've even written a poem concerning it," continued the stranger. "Published in the paper, it was, too—with my name and everything. Yes, indeed, I wrote a poem about it."

"I just love poetry!" exclaimed Mary Elizabeth. "Say it for us, won't you?"

"I doubt I can remember all of it, at least not exactly. But perhaps I have the clipping somewhere."

"In a way, it's about candy," he explained, as he explored his wallet. "And in a way it's about everything. Let's see. This is it. No. That's a laundry statement. Ah, here it is! No. That's a receipt for my club dues. By Jove, I have it now! Well! Well! And that isn't it. Ah, this is it!"

He drew from the wallet a worn scrap of paper, and lovingly. Jumbles was looking at Lisbeth with round, unbelieving eyes. For the wallet had been crammed, almost to bursting, with yellow bank notes.

"Are you ready?" asked the portly man, clearing his throat, striking an attitude, and swelling out his waistcoat. "You musn't interrupt me, you know."

"Yes, please," answered Lisbeth. "Goodness, I mean no, we shan't."

In a fat voice, that wheezed considerably, accompanied by gestures of one plump hand, the stranger read this poem:

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THE PENNY

When I wanted a penny I never had any
To spend at the grocery store;
But now that I've many and many a penny
A penny 's not much any more.
As many as twenty you'd think would be plenty
To buy everything that he had;
But I hadn't a penny and couldn't get any,
And so I was lonely and sad.
They might think it funny, but if I had money,
As much as a couple of dimes,
I'd ask them to change it, and I would arrange it
To spend it a number of times.
But now that I've plenty, and far more than twenty,
I've gone to the grocery store
With many a penny, who once hadn't any—
But a penny 's not much any more.

There was a long silence, during which Jumbles chewed at a grass stem. Lisbeth, on the contrary, regarded the chance-met poet with eyes of gentle melancholy.

"And what do you think of it?" asked the stranger.

"It's simply beautiful!" declared Lisbeth.

"Yeh," said Jumbles.

"That's what everyone says," added the poet complacently. "Well, I must be going." And he strode briskly away.

"How far it is to some place?" cried Jumbles after him.

"How should I know?" replied the poet without turning.

"Well, where are you going?" called Lisbeth.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he answered.

He was disappointing—very. And they talked again of the problem of a night's lodging, which is always less than nothing to those who have solved it and ever a very grave concern to those who haven't.

“I’ll tell you, Lisbeth,” said Jumbles at length. “We’ve no means of knowing how far it is to anywhere else, and at any rate we know there is water here. If I build a fire against the cliff, and bring some fir boughs for you, then you’ll be comfortable as can be. We might as well stay here as go on. Mightn’t we?”

“Well—” said Lisbeth doubtfully.

“I’ll go and fetch some boughs,” declared Jumbles. With that he was across the highway in a jiffy, and at the edge of the forest. Turning he smiled reassuringly.

“You might find some twigs for the fire,” he said, and parted the hazel. It waved about him. It was agitated for a score of feet outward from the highway. And she could neither see nor hear him any longer. Which, of itself, was well enough.

The trouble was that he didn’t come back.

No, he didn’t come back. Of course, for the space of several minutes she scarcely expected him, while she busied herself with the gathering of small dry branches for the campfire. And this she laid and would have lighted. But there weren’t any matches. She felt he really should have left her a match or two, that she might have their fire going. Goodness, he had been gone an unreasonable length of time, when his errand was only to cut an armful of fir boughs. She looked expectantly toward the hazel. But the hazel didn’t stir and wave to her. She listened intently. But there was no sound except the tap-tapping of a woodpecker. All this while the shadows were flooding the highway, and taking gradual but utter possession of it. The beginning of panic tightened her throat, and this sensation only served to waken a resentment against the absent Jumbles. Quitting the rock she crossed the cobbles and paused before the hazel thicket. Somehow the wood seemed not so friendly as did the forest about Horse-foot.

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She shrank from entering it. It was so darkly, peculiarly silent that it was as though the wood watched her, biding its time until she should venture into it.

“Jumbles!” she called. “O-o-o-h, Jumbles!”

A tremendous, hoarsened echo came rolling back to her, very frightful to hear. But there wasn’t any answer. She called again and again, as she ran to and fro along the highway, fighting back her sobs. There was no answer. Swiftly as a hawk strikes, and with precisely that cruel completeness, night

was upon the forest. Her back was to the tall cliff, whence she stared outward at the darkness. And Jumbles didn't come. She was prey to a thousand nameless forebodings, and the least of these was terror itself. Then slowly she sank to the turf, down to the unseen dandelions, the cool grasses, and sobbed aloud. There were rustlings in the hazel. There were stirrings in the trees. A dread and occult conspiracy was plotted against her. The remote, white stars were without comfort. They, too, were watching with cold impersonality, with nothing of friendliness, the girl that crouched by the cliff. And her heart gave a wild leap, as to stifle her, when two huge eyes of blazing emerald burned at her from the hazel.

"Jumbles!" she screamed.

Shadow out of shadow, the thing curved to the dark sheen of the cobbles. Momentarily it loitered there, its emerald fires unquenched. Nearer and nearer now. Nearer. She shut her eyes against it and waited. There was a warmth and softness at her cheek. There was a friendly warmth upon the hands that trembled at her face. And in this warmth was a deep, pleasant, soundless rumbling. Then Lisbeth knew the thing for what it was, and threw her two arms about it, and buried her face in the softness of its purring throat.

"Oh, Monster!" she cried. "You frightened me so!"

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For it was none other than the cougar that had been with the Dark Woman at Horsefoot. She felt that the Dark Woman had sent the cougar to her in her need, and though her anxiety concerning Jumbles was not allayed she was somewhat consoled, since, no longer fearing the night, she began to plan a rescue. For that he had met with mishap, or was held captive, she did not doubt. And that the cougar would help her to find him she could not question. Indeed, the cougar seemed to reassure her on this point, without so much as saying a word. She drew her body to the warmth of the great cat, and contrived to be as comfortable as she might, under the circumstances. And since cats were originally intended for the assuaging of feminine grief, she was quite comfortable, though the night was very long.

And the night was without incident, save that twice or thrice Monster rose lithely, without by-your-leave, to turn the emerald flame upon the thicket. And sundry rustlings, and paddings, and whisperings died prudently away. Toward morning she may have drowsed for half an hour, for she thought only to close her eyes an instant, yet when she opened them

the stars were pale and scattered. Monster stood beside the hazel, sleek, fine head turned backward to her, long tail quivering restlessly.

“Come!” he seemed to say.

And Mary Elizabeth went into the gloomy hazel with the Dark Woman’s cougar.



CHAPTER XIV.

Of how Lisbeth and Monster sought Jumbles through the forest of dawn.—And of the cavern that Lisbeth entered alone.—The curious nature of the great cave and its illumination.—How Lisbeth met the Blessed Damozel and was aided to the finding of Jumbles.—Of the escape from the Cave of Books.



NOW was Lisbeth threading it through the hazel in the grayness that is before dawn. And swiftly, too, for Monster moved as water flows, and only her utmost effort kept pace with him. They passed the hazel and were hastening under the grave and giant trees, each tree a shadowy mystery in itself. It was that hour when birds speak sleepily one to another, and test their voices for the song in praise of morning. By briar and bracken, by brook and hollow, by crags that were wreathed in cloud, they sped through the forest urgently, and behind them the grayness was tintured and tinted with rose. Monster was never at loss for direction, and the confidence of the great cat was somehow transmitted to Lisbeth, who felt—despite her anxiety—that all would yet be well.

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Hazel stayed her again, but she put it recklessly aside and burst through. They had traversed the forest and were on a high plateau of tossed and tumbled rock, where no shrubs grew, nor any tree had foothold. Midway of the table land, in the grayness, Lisbeth discerned the face of a towering rock-wall, pierced by a darkness greater than its own—and this she knew to be the entrance to a cavern. Above it glowed a pale and eerie band of light.

And Monster slackened his pace, being reluctant to go forward, and twice or thrice made as to turn aside. Nevertheless he led her very near to

the cavern mouth ere, with a fanged snarl and hissing, he crouched and drew back. So crouched, the cougar looked up at her, as though to say that he, at least, had done his part, and thereafter she must fare alone. As she stroked the beautiful, dread head in gratefulness, yet with the hope that Monster would not desert her, the cat swerved beneath her hand, leaped into the grayness and was seen no more. Then Mary Elizabeth was very much alone, and it mended matters not at all to reflect that she must enter the cavern. Yes, enter it she must, if she would find Jumbles. She raised her eyes to the pale, flickering ribbon of light above the entrance, and discovered this luminosity to issue from an inscription carved in the rock. And the inscription was:

THE CAVE OF BOOKS

(NO DOGS ALLOWED)

TRAVELER, THINK TWICE

The light which illumined the inscription was positively disconcerting. It burned with a chill and restless flame. The flame was without warmth or spirit. "It's nothing but phosphorous," she told herself. However, she couldn't quite be sure of this.

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The darkness of the entrance was nothing but darkness—yet this didn't help. It was a darkness of most forbidding quality, and so utter and absolute it was, so dankly, darkly thick and impenetrable, she felt it could not possibly be real. And in this, too, was terror.

"Oh, Jumbles!" she called, cupping her hands. The cavern roared with her own voice, but that was all.

And Lisbeth put foot to that threshold, fearful of quite nameless things as she entered. But the way was smooth, and she went forward through the velvet, unreal darkness without difficulty or mishap, almost as though she had been surely guided. Indeed, dread quitted her in a dozen steps, and eagerness replaced her timidity. For, from the first, she was certain that the darkness led to Jumbles, and that she should discover him in the cave.

The darkness was permeated with a fragrance she strove to identify, an odor alike sad and comforting. It was not without sweetness, yet it was musty, too. It was not without staleness, yet it was spicy also. It smelled

like the past, thought Mary Elizabeth. But, of course, that was nonsense. Yet it did smell like last summer and last winter, though reason told her this was absurd. Why, it smelled like the caravels of Columbus! It had an odor of Ivanhoe! Lisbeth paused in the darkness, and smiled cheerfully to herself, for she had identified the fragrance at last.

“It’s books!” she exclaimed happily. “It’s books!” rumbled the unseen walls. And she knew why the darkness no longer affrighted her, and how her steps were directed with such certainty along a way she could not perceive.

But now the darkness no longer was absolute, and now the stone walls of the passage were evident—for at some distance there was light enough and to spare,

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and a very mellow and genial light it was. She ran forward, her footfalls echoing, into an ample chamber that was books—all books—books and mellow brightness. Shelves upon shelves of books, in leather and in linen—in every phase and tone of color. The light—though this she determined later—was provided in that chamber, as elsewhere, by massive, leathern-bound volumes swung on golden chains from the lofty granite ceiling of the cavern, and these books were grouped or suspended singly. The radiance of one was never like to the radiance of another—indeed, the quality of light within the groups was often varied—yet the radiance of all was blent in that agreeable mellowness, hued like honey-mead, which quite filled the cavern to its remotest nook. If you can imagine a brightness so tempered that it is somewhat wistful, and a wistfulness so tintured that it is radiant, then you will have imagined the light that flooded the Cave of Books.

Seated at a spacious oaken desk, facing the entrance, with card indexes at either hand, and pens and pencils laid ready like a surgeon’s kit, was a thin prim woman, very severely tailored, whose manner was decisively bewildered. The primness of her hair, pinned tightly back to a lusterless knob, was dully streaked with gray, and her prim thin lips were grimly, positively and sadly firm. Her eyes were blue, and faded, and severe, and they were prim, too, but despite these attributes, they were puzzled. She had the look of being dry and brittle as macaroni. That she was someone of importance was more than evident, and toward her Mary Elizabeth hastened. Nay, she leaped, for it seemed that the search for Jumbles must surely be at an end.

“S-s-s-s-h-h-h-h!” warned the woman at the oaken desk, and most reprovably.

All round and about, as Lisbeth saw with a guilty

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glance, were men and women, and children, too, bent above their open books. And some were serious, and some were smiling, but each was entranced. Through all the chamber was the ceaseless, soft rustling of turning leaves. They had no looks for one another, these many readers, and Lisbeth’s heart was chill as she realized, she knew not how, that they were captive to the cave, and might not quit the place; that they durst not stir from it, nor give their thoughts to budding trees, nor to bird flight, nor life, nor love, nor aught that should have touched them intimately. And the great pity of it was—they did not care. Into what fell enchantment had Jumbles wandered?

“I’m sorry,” whispered Lisbeth to the personage at the desk. “But perhaps you’ll help me, if you’ll only be so kind.”

“Certainly, I will,” whispered the prim little woman severely. “It’s my duty and privilege to help you. I am Miss Information. What is it you wish?”

“Please, I’m only looking for a boy named Jumbles,” replied Lisbeth eagerly. “I think he came in here. At least Monster says he did. Have you seen him?”

“S-s-s-s-h-h-h-h!” warned the thin, prim woman again, for Lisbeth had all unconsciously raised her voice above the rustling leaves. “Jumbles?” repeated Miss Information. “Why, to be sure. The subject has been exhaustively discussed by Bertha M. Batter in her excellent work, ‘Perplexing Pastries.’ I’ll have it for you presently. Monster? Monster” she continued. “Ah, yes. Dr. Tejus treats fully of monsters in his classic, ‘Freaks Before Adam.’ You’ll find everything you wish, I fancy, in those two books. Just a moment.” She pressed a black button at her elbow.

“I’m sure there’s some mistake—” began Mary Elizabeth.

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“S-h-h-h-h-h-h!” warned Miss Information for a third time.

And there stood a girl, smiling shyly, who seemed to have materialized from nowhere. She was as fresh and dear, in that enchantment, and by marked contrast with the woman at the desk, as a morning hour in mid-

April. Her hair, in light and pleasing rebellion, was yellow like ripe corn. Her blue, grave eyes were deep as a deep water, even. She and Lisbeth were of one age. They liked one another at once, and without speech. To this girl the personage gave a card, with a word of whispered instruction. And, turning away, the girl motioned Lisbeth to follow.

It was then Mary Elizabeth realized, as she followed her guide, how strangely the girl was attired. Ah, strangely, indeed. For she was dressed in a frock of paper, tinted by the chemistry of time to soft ivory, and the paper was printed thickly, but sans pattern, with what appeared to be fragments of verse. These Lisbeth endeavored to read, with scant success. Wherefore, and because she wished to explain, she laid a hand upon the girl's shoulder, beneath that glory of tresses, and the girl halted at once. They stood smiling. There was a white rose at the girl's white throat, and the whiteness of the one was that of the other.

"May I read?" whispered Lisbeth.

The girl nodded. In the mellowed, wistful light of the chamber Lisbeth recovered, from the warp and woof and wonder of the words that were on the girl's frock, these lines only:

Circle-wise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread ...

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But scattered phrases, and words also, touched her with their purity, their beauty, as though she were beneath the drift of apple-bloom in the orchard of Back of Beyond. There was the familiar happiness in her throat that tasted of tears.

"Who are you?" she asked. And again, "Who are you?"

"I am only a page in the Cave of Books," said the girl. "And who are you?"

"I am Mary Elizabeth, from Back of Beyond. Tell me your name."

"The name that I have is strange, even to me," was the answer. "My name is The Blessed Damozel."

Lisbeth told her everything—how she didn't want a book on cookery, and cared not at all for another on dinosaurs, but how she did wish to find

Jumbles again—and how she must find him. To all of which The Blessed Damozel nodded gravely.

“I quite understand,” she said sympathetically. “Perhaps I understand far better than you realize. So come along, Lisbeth, and we’ll look for this Jumbles of yours.”

“He’s not my Jumbles,” protested Lisbeth. “He’s just only—”

“Yes, I quite understand,” said The Blessed Damozel serenely. And they went in search of Jumbles.

They looked everywhere and everywhere, in as many as a dozen chambers, each filled with silent readers, laden shelves and tables, and the rustling of leaves. In their quest they disturbed cobwebs from shelf to reader, and from reader to shelf, so that the spiders were busy repairing this damage for a fortnight. But though they found an hundred or more youths of comparable age, each thrall to an open book, nowhere did they come upon a boy in well-worn denims, with gaiters of canvas,

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and scuffed shoes, who wore a slim sword in a green scabbard at his thigh. Not anywhere did they find Jumbles. Lisbeth’s lips began to tremble, and when she spoke her voice was woefully uncertain.

“I guess he isn’t here,” she said.

They were standing in the greatest chamber of all, its walls solidly lined with an inconceivable number of books, its reading tables thronged with a silent, enchanted multitude. And Lisbeth was very weary. The ceaseless, soft rustle of book leaves had somehow grown hateful to her. The Blessed Damozel considered her with compassion.

“It doesn’t follow that he isn’t,” said she. “There’s at least one more chamber to which we haven’t been. But I can’t go with you to that chamber, Lisbeth. It’s forbidden. Only the Head Librarian may visit it, and only he has the key to the chamber. It is the Room of Books That are Yet to be Born.”

“Then take me to the Head Librarian!” urged Lisbeth almost fiercely.

“No, dear, I dare not. You must go alone.”

“Where is he?”

“Yonder.”

So Lisbeth kissed The Blessed Damozel in farewell, bidding her know that she should always be welcome to Back of Beyond, and drew near to the broad dais that is the throne and temporal seat of that superior authority

which has in charge all books, and which may be approached only with diffidence or trepidation, so august and absolute is the power therein vested. But, being committed to the rescue of Jumbles, she neither shrank from the ordeal nor trembled at her own temerity. Boldly she approached the dais, with its enormous, volume-burdened desk of sable walnut, and boldly she addressed the presence that was seated there.

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"I have come for Jumbles"

"I have come for Jumbles," she said. "You will please help me to find him."

The Head Librarian would have been lamentably dwarfed by his desk, for he proved to be of slight stature, the merest wisp of a man, sere as late grass, had it not been for the fact that the lenses of his spectacles were of the thickest. They glistened fearsomely, contriving for him an awesomeness all but sepulchral. He wore a black skull cap, green with service, and his threadbare black suit was likewise tinted by time. There emanated from him, moreover, a certain majesty, a somber spiritual effluvium, that was both depressing and fearsome. The hue of his beardless cheek was that of something grown in a cave.

“Well?” said the Head Librarian shrilly, looking up from the illuminated vellum before him.

“I’ve come for Jumbles,” repeated Lisbeth.

“What have I to do with Jumbles, young miss?” inquired the Head Librarian. “Be off, and do not bother me. Name of Gutenberg! Even now you are violating the rules.”

“I shan’t be off, rules or no rules,” insisted Lisbeth, “until I have found him.”

“Ah, so!” exclaimed the Head Librarian, spectacles glinting horribly. “The wind’s in that quarter, is it? Be sensible, child. Draw yourself a book, and sit down to read it. That is best. Yes, that is best. For you’ll never see Jumbles again.”

“Then you know where he is?”

“Why, surely! This hand is withered, but it turned the key. Indeed, I know where he is. Who better? Draw yourself a romance, my dear; something between covers; something that isn’t drawn from your own heart. Here are many. It is best to draw one’s romance from

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a laden shelf. Then one may choose. Sit down! Sit you down and read!”

“No! Give me the key!”

The Head Librarian indulged himself in thin, brittle laughter—laughter most terribly old and pithless, laughter long drained of all the fine essence of mirth. Lisbeth regarded him with loathing.

“Give you the key!” he cried. “Not I! I tell you he is mine! Sit you down or return to your orchard, child, I care not which. For I will not release him. No, not I.”

“Were you never young?” asked Lisbeth, and calmness came to her with the question.

"I? Young? Mark what they have done to me, child. On a day long and long ago, when the mock-orange was in bloom, and the catfish were biting in Taylor's creek, I laid a certain volume aside, saying only, 'You can't find it in books.' Nor can you. But because I said as much, I am what I am, and so I cannot let this Jumbles go."

"It's a riddle, probably," answered Mary Elizabeth. "And I haven't time for it. You shall let him go!"

"Now by all the characters of the Phoenician alphabet, I will not! By Cadmus, I swear it! His plight shall be comparable to mine."

"You're trying to make me ask what happened to you."

"Ah, you may well ask. 'You can't find it in books,' quoth I. And in recognition of my penury, as in punishment for my crime, they made of me a librarian. And here the years have overtaken me."

"I know," said Mary Elizabeth. Suddenly she had ceased to hate him. Into her voice there crept a nuance of understanding, of pity. "But you haven't answered my question. I asked you if you were ever young?"

For the space of a moment or two there was only the

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rustling of book leaves in the chamber. That—and a thin, tired sigh from the lips of the Head Librarian.

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered. "I tried to evade you, my dear. I was young once. But she— But she—" He ceased to speak.

"And now must it be I, because of her?" asked Lisbeth gently. "And must it be Jumbles, because of you? Give me the key, please."

He had taken a huge brass key from a drawer in the desk. He was turning it over and over, without consciousness of this employment. Lisbeth yearned toward the key, but restrained herself. It was a time for patience.

"After all," said the Head Librarian, as to himself, "you can't find it in books. But, ah, the glory and wonder of them! It will mean that we shall lose a book, and a good book, too, if I am any judge. And a lost book, a book that never is written, is a woeful sorrow. But there are times, I fear, when it appears to me that the profession of letters pales beside the fact it would record. Was not alfalfa, such as this boy would grow, borne around the world in the pommel of a sword? May not an onion, a proper onion, constitute an epic? And it may be, as once I thought, or dared to think, that a field of grain is itself a song. That life and labor are themselves a book." He paused. "Do you know where he is, child?"

“Yes,” said Lisbeth. “He is in the Room of Books That are Yet to be Born.” Oh, she must be so very patient with him.

“Ah, well, and if I turn the key, what then? He will be without fame, while on the other hand he will have happiness. If I turn the key the world will lack a book, will grieve a book that it has never known. This is not pleasing to me. It does not wholly suit my purpose.

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While if the Board should ever hear of it!” He drummed on the desk with white, ink-stained fingers. Then he looked up again, and Lisbeth saw that he was more than half resolved.

“For an old day, for a lost dream, I may do this thing,” said the Head Librarian. “But you also shall not be without your responsibility. Think well.”

“Tell me what it is,” she cried, “for I am not afraid!”

“You may judge for yourself, my dear,” said the Head Librarian. “Come.” And rising he took up the key.

They crossed the rustling, great chamber to enter a dim corridor, and by this came soon to a door all strengthened and studded with dark griffins of iron and iron flowers of the poppy. To Lisbeth the deliberation with which he fitted and turned the key was interminable. But the lock whined, the heavy door complained as it swung open, and they were at last in the forbidden sanctity of the Room of Books That are Yet to be Born.

And there was Jumbles! It is true that in this chamber were scores of silent, tranced figures. But there was Jumbles! And she was at his side on the instant. Yet Jumbles did not so much as glance at her, nor would he answer when she spoke to him. In his two hands he held, while seated before unwritten paper, a vapory bright volume—a thing of mist and fancy, yet singularly real. And as it was with Jumbles, so was it with all the others. Each held in his hands, or hers, a book that was yet to be born. And each smiled that same far smile which was on Jumbles’ lips and in his musing eyes. Dream-drenched and silent all.

“Jumbles!” she entreated.

“No, he cannot answer you,” explained the Head Librarian. “I shall inform you presently as to how that may be brought about. Meantime, look around you, for none save myself and such as are chosen ever visited this

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room—until you cozened me so cleverly. Ah, my dear, what wouldn't many a one give to stand where you are standing."

Mary Elizabeth thought then to humor him, for still it was necessary that she be tactful. She looked about the room with an impatience she sought to conceal. It was brighter than any other chamber she had visited, though it was lighted by but a single book of luminous, golden vagueness. This book, suspended from the chill, far granite, seemed not of unusual dimensions, but the radiance of its fluttering pages dazzled the eyes, and a sound welled from it, one would have vowed, that was of ineffable sweetness and grave, sure wisdom.

"The Perfect Book," explained the Head Librarian, reading her thought. "And it, of course, never has been penned, no more than any of these. Yet, it is in the light of that book all these would be written."

"Oh, set him free!" pleaded the girl, forgetting her resolve to be prudent. But the Head Librarian was no whit offended. He had burned his bridges. His manner toward the girl was wholly tolerant now, and oddly tender.

"He will have more of happiness, but none of fame," said the Head Librarian.

"Set him free!"

"The world will be deprived of a good book, a rather fairish book, I take it," said the Head Librarian.

"The world has books enough!"

"Quite true, my dear. Quite true. Then do you take—for this is the responsibility of which I spoke—that book from his two hands. Nay, have no fear; he will yield it. So. And having taken it, rend the book page from page until no page remains."

Jumbles sat smiling at his empty hands. He had not looked at her. He had not spoken. The sorcery was on

him yet. In her hands was the ephemeral, misty volume that never had been written, and soon could never be. Sorrow smote her, and misgivings, and she cried out, and would have restored the book.

"There is no other way," insisted the Head Librarian. "Rend it."

Then the girl tore the book, page by page, and it was as though she were rending gossamer. It was as though she were rending the silken tissue of dream. And as she tore the pages they ceased to be, even as mist ceases when it is done. Yet she rent no page away without regret for that which she

did, nor without surpassing pity for the tranced Jumbles. Presently there was only one page remaining, a page of little printing—but whereas the other pages had been too vague to decipher, the letters on this page leaped out at her like a remembered voice. For they were darkly, glowingly evident. They formed two words, only, and the words were:

TO LISBETH.

She stared long at the words, while the Head Librarian smiled at her, his spectacles glinting, flashing. Rustle. Rustle. And the quick intake of her own breath.

“This page I will keep always!” cried Lisbeth. “I cannot tear it away!”

“Then all that you have torn shall avail you nothing,” said the Head Librarian. “Rend it, my child. Ah—so!”

And Mary Elizabeth tore the page quite away.

There was a sound as of snow-crests thundering to the avalanche, as of many rivers in flood—and a pleasant stillness in which mountain quail were whistling. It was full morning, and Lisbeth and Jumbles were walking together on an agreeable turf, sprinkled well with

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small white daisies. To the right hand, and below them, were vistas of highway through the trees.

“When I went for fir boughs,” said Jumbles, half to himself and half to her, “there was an old man who walked before me. I followed him into the forest. He was ever and ever so old. He read from a book as he walked, and the words were like flame and flowers. I cannot imagine whatever became of him.”

“Well, I shouldn’t try to imagine,” said Lisbeth.





CHAPTER XV.

Being the very remarkable account of the meeting with Hassan the Wanderer.—And of the repast which a conjurer will pluck from the air.—How the silver casket excited their most lively interest and apprehension.—And of the bickering with two highwaymen.—Revealing also the dread secret of the casket.



HEY were cooking trout. These they had caught in a brook beside the highway, with a bent pin for hook and a linen raveling for line, with a willow for rod, and the high and earnest joy of fishermen in their hearts. There was a little fire of twigs and embers, with flat stones slanted toward it, and on the stones they broiled the trout. But the trout resisted the flame, even in death, and curled and flinched before it, so that Lisbeth was moved to pity for them. But Jumbles scoffed at this, for—said he—the trout were quite dead, and the necessity of the travelers was great.

“It doesn’t do to be too tender hearted, Lisbeth,” he said. “For if you are, you’ll starve. There’s a sort of

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law about it. Watch the brook for a minute, and you’ll see. There—under the willows.”

Above the dancing water, that lifted and fell, and hastened and loitered, and spun round and round in minor eddies of emerald, floated a mist of faerie—a cloud of delicate, slender bodies, upborne on wings of gauze. And these were of that ephemeral life which lives, and loves, and is given unto death between sun and sun—whose moments are as months, whose hours are as years, but for whom eternity is neither less nor greater than for us.

Now when the ephemerids drew near to the restless surface of the brook, beneath the willows, it chanced that sundry of them trailed their gauzes in the current—never to rise again. For silver flashed under, or curved sweetly over, as they were taken by the hungry trout of the pool. But those that remained to live and love hovered the water as merrily as before. And Mary Elizabeth sighed to observe this, for it seemed to her—as to many another—that life is quite unnecessarily abrupt and arbitrary in its dealings with life's children.

“My goodness!” she exclaimed. “How hungry I am!”

The broiled trout, and of these there were seven that had been taken before the pin was lost, were ranged on fresh leaves—and truly the trout were not huge, nor were they many. There was gratitude in the hearts of the travelers for this fare, however, as each took up a fish. And, in taking up the fish, they were aware that no longer were they alone. Then Lisbeth sighed again, for she knew there weren't trout enough.

The stranger was as strange as any they had encountered. He was thin as a reed and solemn as a deacon—but there all churchly semblance ended. He stood glooming

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down at them, as from a far height, and he was robed in dusky scarlet. His feet, as gracefully arched as a nautch girl's, were brown and bare. Above the narrow, high forehead was piled and heaped a vastness of green turban, and central in this was caught a great, faceted stone of flashing, shimmering splendor—a jewel of flame and blood. Crooked in his right arm, the scarlet sleeve swaying, was a casket of wrought silver, thrice a hand-span in length, twice in width, and of a depth proportionate. The face of the stranger was a bronzed olive, beardless, and his eyes brooded in a darkness not to be fathomed.

“Why, you're just in time for luncheon!” said Lisbeth in greeting.

“Sit down!” urged Jumbles, with the merest glance at the five remaining trout.

“Those are excellent words to hear,” said the stranger. His voice was deeply, gravely, musical. Yet he glanced about him as one in some uncertainty. His dark brows descended, lifted, made startling play, and under them the darkness of his eyes held little fragments of fire. To the left hand and to the right he glanced.

“Was there something?” asked Jumbles rising.

“By Allah! Yes. There is. Could I but hit upon a resting place for this casket of mine. Not there—for there are pebbles. Nor there—for there are certain herbs.”

“Let me have it,” said Jumbles, holding out his hands, since the matter seemed trivial to him.

But the stranger stepped swiftly backward, and there was terror in his cry.

“Nay, touch it not! Forbear! It is sealed from you! Give Allah praise that it is sealed!”

“But—” stammered Jumbles.

“In an instant you would have touched it! And the

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seal might have burst beneath your hand! My veins are cold to think of what must then have befallen! Young sir, this is your fortunate day!”

He drew somewhat apart from them, and still clasping the casket jealously, fearfully, stooped to observe the ground, to scrutinize it sharply, ere with his left hand he brushed aside the slight waste of the sod. Then, and then only, did he relinquish the casket, placing it ever so gently, and bending low before it. He swept his two hands outward from his forehead, as hawks wing, and twice again he bent down before the casket. He quitted it as one quits the presence of majesty, backing slowly away, while Lisbeth and Jumbles were agape to witness such remarkable conduct. But, this done, he seated himself briskly enough, though as crashing downward from a cliff, so tall was he, and with bewildering rapidity, and never a word, consumed four of the five remaining trout.

The two wayfarers felt their hearts sink, for but one trout remained to them, and this the smallest of the catch. Lisbeth wondered if it would be manners to seize upon the trout, without undue haste, and proffer it to Jumbles, while Jumbles, for his part, was blackly resolved that Lisbeth should have the fifth fish, manners or no manners. But their guest set all this at naught by taking up the fish, and stripping it with scarce more than a gesture, and a flash of even, white teeth. He tossed the flimsy little skeleton aside, and cleansed his fingers upon the turf.

“The savor of food that is offered in kindness, out of a generous hand,” he said, “is more excellent than the melons of paradise. Of gentleness to the hungry stranger, Allah himself partakes.”

In the silence which ensued, for the travelers felt themselves at loss for reply, they heard the whisper and

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chuckling of the brook, and the sighing of the breeze in the willows. But they heard also, for the first time, a strange and minor sound quite alien to the place. It was a faintness of scratching, interspersed with pauses. It was a cold and curious sound, as when a spade grates against glass in the garden, and shiverings strike horribly to one's spine. And again it was a meditative sort of sound, as though that which caused it was engaged in thoughtful tinkering. And anon it was the pattering of feet, pursued or pursuing—of feet elfin as fancy. But mostly it was of that rasping chillness which brings shiverings. It wasn't in the willows, and it couldn't be by the brook. Nor was it bird nor insect, nor any creature strayed from the forest. And then they perceived that the stranger had fixed his strange eyes on the casket of wrought silver, and that he regarded it with a dread affection. The sound came from the casket, and as they realized that it did, some trick of sunshine drew a face forth from the intricate design upon the lid, and the face seemed to grimace at them. And thereupon the face faded and a cobra lay coiled with twitchings in the sun, so wondrous had been the skill of the silversmith. The serpent faded, too, and Lisbeth beheld the grave, sad visage, the rounded paunch, the bowed fore-legs, of a great toad shaped in the silver. So extraordinary was the sound that issued from the casket, so curious were the creatures caught in the metal, and so singular was the look its proprietor had for it, that Lisbeth drew instinctively away. But Jumbles leaned forward.

"What have you got in the box?" asked Jumbles.

"Give thanks to Allah that you do not know!" replied the stranger. "Young sir, I have eaten your salt, I have broken bread with you. Then may my tongue wither if ever I tell you this! Take back the wish!"

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"We didn't have any salt," remarked Mary Elizabeth somewhat sadly.

"And we didn't have any bread," added Jumbles with aggrieved emphasis. "All we had was seven trout. And we lost the pin."

"Here is a common error, as I find it," said the turbaned one. "Seven fish? And this was all your fare? Are you quite certain, boy? And you, girl?"

By Solomon, I tell you that Hassan the Wanderer knows more of your resources than do you. Behold!”

He flashed forth a long arm, and before the rounded eyes of Jumbles he drew a ripe fig from the dark tresses of the girl. This he tossed in her lap, and his hand leaped to the frayed jacket of the boy. And seemingly from a pocket there came, though Jumbles well knew the pocket had been empty, a second fig. This to the boy’s hand, and thereafter—until all awe was gone from them, and their eyes shone with mirth and happiness—Hassan the Wanderer evoked from nothingness more dainties than they well might eat—ripe figs, fat dates, sweetmeats most delicate to the tongue, whose nature they could not even guess, small cakes that crumbled away as sugar melts, and grapes so honey-sweet that golden bees came tumbling down to them as Hassan tossed them to the turf.

“Seven fish?” he would say. “And this was all your fare? Children! Children! You are blind as flitter-mice!”

And bending forward he would draw from some fold of their garments, their eyes witnessing, yet another sweetmeat; or, outstretching a hand to the willow, he would pluck the purple grapes where none had been—so that they scarce could eat for interest and for laughter. But never once did Hassan laugh.

“Seven fish?” he cried. “And these were all?”

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He sprang towering to his feet, threw up his two hands, palms open, the sleeves of dusky scarlet sweeping like wings, and into his hands there fell—both Lisbeth and Jumbles would have vowed it fell—a rounded small melon, silken-smooth and of the hue of leafage in April. There was no tree above him—and, of course, there wasn’t any garden, nor do melons grow upon trees. But there it was in Hassan’s hands, a veritable melon, and he upheld it strainingly to the sky.

“Seven fish?” he said, and dropped the melon beside them.

It was an incomparable melon, as a melon so procured should be—and it was both food and drink. And when they had eaten the last morsel of its cool sweetness, and washed their hands and faces in the brook, they were ready again for the highway, and happy that they had given five trout to Hassan the Wanderer, and happier still that he was traveling their road. And Lisbeth looked long at the brook, and the turf, and the willows, because she wished to remember where it was that she had been so happy. They had

quite forgotten the silver casket, and the sound that came from it. Then Jumbles bethought him, and stooped to take the box. But Hassan almost dashed him aside, and caught up the casket, and cried out in a terrible voice.

“Oh, rash and impetuous boy! What is it you would do?”

“I wanted to carry it for you,” faltered Jumbles. “That’s all.”

“Not you, of all the world,” said Hassan, more calmly. “I could not suffer it, Jumbles. By Allah’s will I must bear this burden, and keep watch over it, and I only. Do not ask it again. On my hope of paradise, I urge you—do not ask it again.”

So they took to the highway, but Lisbeth and Jumbles

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loitered at Hassan’s striding heels and whispered together. Then running forward they walked beside him, at a round pace, and Lisbeth looked far up to the lean turbaned face of their friend.

“We won’t ask to carry the box, not ever again, Hassan,” she promised. “But tell us the story of it, won’t you? I’m sure it must have a story.”

“A story, Lisbeth?” echoed Hassan the Wanderer. “It has of stories more than several. A thousand and one tales, each fit to chill your blood, would not suffice to tell the full tale of this charge I bear about the world.”

“One of them will do, Hassan, for a beginning,” pleaded Lisbeth. “Tell us.”

“You have asked it,” said Hassan somberly. “Well, then—In the seventh decade of the reign of Prester John, whose realms were not in Africa, as has been said, but toward Cathay, there was put to torture a prophet-priest called Ricardo the Flame, and this for certain utterances against the crown. The ways of torture in those times were infinite in number and exquisite in effect, nor did Prester John bid his executioners choose the meanest. The heart of Ricardo was broken in his breast, so unendurable was the agony he needs must endure, and in his extremity he exclaimed repeatedly in a tongue alien to all that heard him, save for certain dark, forbidden words. Now these words have much to do with the tale of the casket—but I may not say them, nor may any other.”

With this Hassan the Wanderer left off speaking, and though they expected him soon to resume, when his agitation might be conquered, he said never a word until Lisbeth tugged at his scarlet sleeve.

“And then, Hassan?” she prompted.

“I have made a poor beginning,” said Hassan reflectively.

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“That was the four and fortieth tale, and it must wait. Now the tale you shall hear is told as I will tell it. Attend me ...

“It was in this wise. Near the source of the river Euphrates, where the sacred stream is known as the Murad Su, flowing in crystal from the sunny slope of Ala-Dagh, there stands a lonely upas tree, central in the desolation it has wrought. Thereabouts, so men say, is the vicinage of the Lost Garden, whence Father Adam was driven eastward. I pray your attention, for what I shall have to tell of the tree touches closely the origin of the casket. On a day of ill omen there came to the place of the upas, the loveliest of his seven daughters beside him, a prince not anywhere surpassed for—”

But Jumbles had halted abruptly, and was staring down the highway. And Lisbeth followed his look with hers, and Hassan, too. And they saw above the hazel to the right a great whiskered countenance glowering at them, most dark and forbidding; and above the hazel to the left they saw a thin, secret little face, thatched with the reddest of hair, and this face was even more evil than the other. As they watched, the little face winked at the great face, and at the right there lumbered into the highway a muscular, vast man, black and paunchy as a bear; and at the left there leaped a wisp of a fellow, red and thin, and wicked as a weasel. And each was armed with a knotty bludgeon.

“Good day to you, gentles!” laughed the little red one thinly.

“You’ve a kiss for me, lass!” declared the huge black one in tones of thunder.

Then Jumbles knew fear and anger, and he tugged at the blade in the green scabbard—but Hassan thrust his hand aside from the hilt.

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“Yours is no steel for these people,” said Hassan. “Suffer me to parley with them.”

The little red one glided forward, grinning. He surveyed the travelers head to toe, and his eyes tarried on the casket in Hassan’s arm. But they tarried longer on the stone that flamed from the green turban. And all the while the huge black one stood with uplifted bludgeon.

“Yon’s Black Jarvis o’ the Road,” quoth the smaller, jerking a thumb at his companion. “And I am Tyburn Willie. Now that you know with whom

you deal, hand us the stone. Give it here, I say. And your box of silver, too. Into my hand with 'em!"

"Plainly you are men of violence and daring." Hassan's voice was gentleness. "Black Jarvis and Tyburn Willie! These be names of terror. Ah, me. The stone first, I suppose."

He unclasped the gem from his turban, while Jumbles felt shame for him and half resolved to strike. But there was something as of humor on Hassan's face, fleetingly glimpsed, and the boy knew not what to do. Speechless he watched the gem sweep slowly down to the waiting hand of Tyburn Willie. The long, brown fingers relinquished it to that open palm. Black Jarvis o' the Road leaned toward the ruby eagerly.

"God's grace!" shrilled Tyburn Willie, staring as in a spell. For cupped in his open palm, horribly cupped and coiled, was a serpent hued like coral, whose flat, triangular head sought hither and thither with slow and sinister grace. Then Tyburn Willie screamed again, as waking, and cast the serpent from him into the hazel. Black Jarvis strode up to them.

"She seemed a proper sparkler to me, or may I live to swing!" He spat into the dust. "But there's no telling

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about foreigners. Give us the silver box, mate. Be brisk!"

"Then if I must, I must, as Allah wills," sighed Hassan. "But first—"

With a gentleness they could not deny, since his hand was without weapon, he plucked at the jacket of Tyburn Willie, and drew from it, shining gem on gem, such a necklace of pearls as set Lisbeth's heart to dancing, for all her dread. And, still gentleness itself, he put out his hand a second time, freighted with pearls, to discover a golden chain hidden away beneath the grimy collar.

"Do you who are so rich, so rich, stop travelers on the highway for their poor possessions?" sighed Hassan. "What more, Master William, have you on your person? What secret treasure?"

And Tyburn Willie seemed tranced again, his pale eyes bulging, but Black Jarvis shook the forest with a roar of very genuine wrath. He turned upon his small companion with uplifted bludgeon.

"You knave and slit-purse!" roared Black Jarvis. "I'm minded to crack your red poll for you! What else have you kept from me?"

Then Tyburn Willie was himself again, and lifting high his bludgeon in turn, he confronted the black one stoutly, his wicked little face pale with passion.

"These words to an honest man!" he cried. "You tub of stomach! Vast sow! Lay on!"

And they had surely belabored one another to their exceeding hurt, but for the intervention of Hassan. He stepped between them as one would halt the dispute of children, and stilled each with a gesture.

"William of Tyburn!" he chided. "You do not well to quarrel with a leal companion over the gauds of this

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world. Even now he is nigh unto death. And you, Black Jarvis, where is the priest to shrive you?"

With that he held forth his hand once more, toward the heaving breast of the black one, and seemingly he drew therefrom, quite as though it had been bedded to the hilt, a delicate, thin and glistening knife. They saw the hilt against the fabric. They saw the blade withdrawn. Their faces were ashen and Black Jarvis reeled.

"And do you wear such trinkets in your heart's core for fancy's sake?" asked Hassan, turning the knife in the sun. "Nay, tremble not, Black Jarvis o' the Road. You are to die by hemp and not by steel. Live then until that time, as my free gift to you."

The two highwaymen, their quarrel quite forgotten, stepped backward from him, watching that grave, turbaned face, above which flamed the jewel again. They were tensed for flight.

"What?" queried Hassan. "You would leave your friends? So newly made? For shame, good sirs. But first I must yield to you this silver casket as you wished."

"No!" cried the two.

"I say I will!" exclaimed Hassan the Wanderer. "And ere I yield it you shall have the trick of the clasp that confines what is prisoned therein. I'll open it for you, sirs! Turn away, children! Turn away! Ho, I'll open it for you, my fine fellows!"

The brown hand moved deftly over the wrought silver, but Black Jarvis and Tyburn Willie woke to flight. They were off and away down the cobbles, elbows flying, and the turn of the road took them to itself.

Lisbeth and Jumbles chattered so of the discomfiture of the highwaymen that they forgot the tale Hassan had been telling. And as for Hassan, he did not offer

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to resume it, but held his even stride down the highway, his swarthy countenance singularly grave and sad. As they walked thus, those three, they came to that dolorous copse where a plump woman, her hair streaked with gray, her face with tears, sat on a stone and wept loudly. She seemed the very spirit of inconsolable woe.

“Now here’s a sore sorrow,” observed Hassan the Wanderer, halting before her. “Mother, what is your grief?”

“Alack, that ever I was born!”

“Why, that is something which must be lived down by every one of us,” replied Hassan. “What hurt have you had this day?”

“If you please, sir,” said the woman sobbingly, “I am in such dire straits as to confide even in you, who plainly are no Christian. My trouble is this, that I have been set upon, within the hour, by two vagrants of the road, who robbed me of my daughter’s dowry, and tumbled me into the ditch. Ten gold pieces, Master Pagan, each minted of my toil. And now she may not wed the scrivener’s son!”

And she wept afresh, with lamentations that brought responsive tears to Lisbeth’s gray eyes.

“I will tell you something to your advantage, mother,” said Hassan. “Should your daughter wed with the scrivener’s son, she will weep in the night. Now do you wish her dowry in your hand again?”

These words had the immediate effect of staunching her tears and stilling her sobs. Her face was flushed with anger. She screamed at him wildly. How dared he speak so of an estimable young man? How dared he so affront his betters? And had she her way she would scourge the heathen from the country, to the last rascal of them all!

“It is evident to me,” observed Hassan evenly, “that

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only your purse will content you. Take it, therefore, as the gift of the pagan.”

He dropped a purse in her lap. For an instant the woman stared at it, then opened the clasp with trembling fingers, counting one by one those ten fat

pieces of gold the purse held. And, curiously enough, her anger mounted again, more fiercely than ever.

“How came you by my daughter’s dowry?” she shrieked. “Thief and familiar of thieves! Answer me this!”

Hassan had never a word for her, and they left the woman by the roadside, clutching her gold, and screaming after them. But his two companions searched the grave face pityingly, since they realized that in some manner he had filched the purse from the highwaymen that he might restore it to its rightful owner. And Hassan, perceiving this regard, made answer.

“He that was called Black Jarvis had the gold,” said Hassan.

“But how did you get it, Hassan?” asked Jumbles.

“It is a mystery of the strange calling I pursue. I may not tell you how. Yet, touching briefly on the matter, I would say that it is far simpler to filch from a thief than to steal from an honest man.”

Nor would he utter a word more than this, and presently they came to that weathered stile where a gray-beard sat beside the highway, his face in his hands, his shoulders stooped with woe. And Hassan touched him on the jacket thrice before the face was lifted. Its sadness was sorrowful to see.

“And yet another grief that lacks for healing,” said Hassan. “Good father, what hurt has been done you?”

“Such hurt as words may not mend, outlander,” was the laggard, toneless answer.

“Then, graybeard, I myself will lend you the words

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to it. You have been waylaid by a vast man, black as a bear, and his red-polled roadmate, the little one. Is it not true?”

“Aye,” was the answer. In the old eyes an interest kindled, waned, was ashes.

“They threatened you with cudgels, father, and in your weakness of years they took from you something far dearer than the years that are left. Are these not true words, graybeard?”

“Aye! It was as you have said!” The ancient voice was pitiful with renewed hope. “They stole away—”

“Nay, let me finish the tale of it. They stole away the small golden jewel she wore at her throat—the trinket you placed there, graybeard, long ago, when you were scarce more than a lad.”

“In God’s name, sir,” cried the old man, “if you know aught of this matter, give me aid that I may have it back again! For it was all that I had left of her, after three-score years of happiness and hunger together. Oh, help me, stranger, if there be pity in your heart! Help me to find it!”

Then Hassan touched him lightly, at the breast, above the heart, and on the gray smock gleamed a little brooch of gold, in which blue flowers were woven.

“’Tis simply done,” said Hassan.

The ancient snatched the trinket as it were his life, exclaiming over it with words of fondness, and staggered to his feet. He grasped at Hassan wildly

“May God reward you, sir!” he cried. “May the good God guard you always, outlander and pagan though you be! I know not how you came by it. But it is mine again! It is mine!”

His joy followed them down the highway. Lisbeth and Tumbles looked at Hassan with shining eyes as

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they walked. And he, mindful of this regard, made answer again.

“It was William of Tyburn that had the brooch. If he had stolen a score of such I should have filched them all. For in the matter of dexterity, the compassionate Allah took thought of Hassan the Wanderer. It has been alike my gift and my affliction.”

“I think you are splendid, Hassan!” cried Mary Elizabeth.

“And I think you’re cleverer than anybody I know!” cried Tumbles. “Yes, cleverer than anybody else in the world!”

“Not so,” said Hassan. “What am I, children, if I am not a thief also, a thief with a little weakness of his own?”

“You’re not a thief!”

“I should say you aren’t!”

“Ah, yes I am!” Hassan seemed touched in his pride.

“There’s never an abler thief in all the world. It is only that I am afflicted with honesty, and must steal to restore. But for this failing I should have quit the road long since.”

“Well, it isn’t stealing to do as you did,” objected Lisbeth.

“I call it uncommonly able thievery,” insisted Hassan.

“But—”

“You know so little of these matters, children, and I so sadly much. Nay, I am a good thief marred in the shaping. Were this not true, I should sup well tonight.”

“Who is an honest man, if you aren’t, Hassan?” Jumbles put the question as though there couldn’t be any answer.

“By Allah, it is a riddle well deserving a response

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in kind. And to it I would say: What is an honest man?”

“Why, everybody knows what it is to be honest, or not to be.” Lisbeth was round eyed with certainty.

“Nay,” responded Hassan, shaking his turbaned head until the gem was all sparkles of flame. “Far better to say that nobody knows. I will give you a secret without fee.”

They were eager to have this secret of him, and intent to listen. For one who could cause melons to descend from the sky, and grapes to ripen on the hazel—

“It is not melon’s, children, nor is it grapes.” He startled them. “It is this—that there is but one way to gain and hold a name for honesty. And that is by pretense. You must pretend and pretend, nor weary of this pretending. Oh, fiercely and most stubbornly you must pretend, early and late, in thought and deed. And it will end in your being known as honest, as in truth you shall be if only you pretend sufficiently.”

His companions reflected on this, and Mary Elizabeth believed she understood him, at least dimly, but Jumbles could not reconcile aught of pretense with honesty, and declared as much.

“If what you say is true,” objected Jumbles, “then anyone might be brave who pretended not to be afraid, quite as anyone could be honest. Do you mean that?”

And Hassan nodded. The darkness of his eyes was quizzical now, as though he realized whither this talk must lead. Nor was his surmise in the least amiss.

“Then I for one am not going to be afraid any longer,” vowed Jumbles, “even though I am. What’s in that silver box of yours, Hassan?”

“Well asked!” The conjurer bent to peer in the boy’s face. “Oh, excellently besought! I that am a knave have achieved honesty and he that has dread in

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his heart is bold as any lion. Shall I open the box for you, boy?"

"James Christopher!" The girl's cry was blent of entreaty and delight, of apprehension and eagerness.

"Open it!" Jumbles waved her aside. "Stand back, Mary Elizabeth. Open your silver box for me, Hassan!"

Hassan squatted on the cobbles, the casket on his knees, and tugged at the lock. Now it was free. Now the lid was about to rise. The thin scuffling and scraping in the casket was rapid and constant. The left eyebrow of the conjurer lifted unbelievably as he looked at Jumbles.

"Think well," he warned.

But the boy gestured impatiently. And Hassan raised the lid. There on its haunches, peering up at them with little eyes of garnet was—

A small white mouse.

"Fatima! Hither, Fatima!" The mouse scrambled into the brownness of his palm.

"Why, it's only a mouse, after all!" Jumbles was disdainfully disappointed.

"But it's a white, white mouse!" Lisbeth was all glee and happiness. "Let me take it, Hassan. Will it bite? Is Fatima its name? Let me take it, please!"

"It is Fatima to me of evenings, when I have kindled a fire under the stars. Those times I play upon the flute to please the mouse. And then I call it Fatima. At other times, and to the rest of the world, my small and silken white mouse bears another name."

"What name, Hassan?"

"Fear."



CHAPTER XVI.

Concerning a garden hidden by the wayside.—And the woman who was mistress of those fair acres.—How Jumbles fell under the enchantments of La Belle Dame Sans Merci.—And of how Lisbeth desperately contrived to break that spell.—Of the golden one that was Miss Tinkham's sister. —And of their lodging for the night.



It had been an hour or more since they had parted from Hassan the Wanderer, who had insisted that he must return for the small scarlet serpent tossed aside by Tyburn Willie, and the travelers yet were grieved over so soon losing an excellent champion and companion, when they came upon the man with the spade. He was an ancient, dim and shadowy man, whose garments were as faded as himself, and he rested by a rose-trellised gateway at the left hand of the road, the burnished spade gripped like a halberd. Scarce did he seem real to them, of such a grayness was he, but he bade them good day cheerfully enough, and they paused to talk with him. And when they had told him who they were, and of what estate, and how they could not truly say whither they were

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going, he in turn informed them he was a gardener and that the gateway opened to those gardens wherein he toiled.

"I been down the road a piece," he explained, "for a pipe and a saunter. She does not be minding the stroll, young sir, but t'other is poison to her. She can't abide it. Then, too, when the old man goes out for a bit of walk, there's always a likely shrub to be had for the garden, or some wild flower she'll be vexing her heart to tame."

"Who's she?" asked Lisbeth.

“Her ladyship, to be sure, the same I’ve worked for this many a year, since ever she came to the forest for that purpose she has.”

“Her ladyship?”

“She that is called La Belle Dame Sans Merci—and to the sorrow of some, my lass.”

“It sounds foreign as foreign can be,” mused Lisbeth aloud.

“God’s truth, I can’t say as to the land that mothered her,” vowed the old gardener. “But does it matter greatly in a woman?”

Jumbles had been silent, for his thoughts were of the garden. His eyes dwelt hungrily on the burnished spade, bright as a new coin, silvern, its handle brown and polished by much toil. And the ancient perceived this regard understandingly.

“Aye, lad,” he said, “many’s the acre of good loam we’ve loosened and made fruitful, this spade and myself. A body can tell that by the shine of her. A spade must be used freely if the rust is to be denied, and a man would have the proper sweetness of her. Aye, lad, she must. For digging she should not bend far from the straight of the handle—not far—or she’ll turn and twist

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in your grip when she’s burdened. And that spoils the song of it.”

“I know,” said Jumbles.

“Sure, that spoils the song of it. You’ll not be singing it, of course, but ’tis there, all the same. For you thrust, and bend, and swing, and your shoulders lift, and you’ll be tossing the turf aside, until ’tis time for a snack or a pipe—and all the while ’twill be like music to you.”

“But I don’t understand,” said Lisbeth.

“You wouldn’t, lass; not you. ’Tis a song for men.”

Whereupon the old gardener grasped the handle of his spade most firmly, and rose to his feet as mist might lift slowly from the earth, indicating that he must take his leave of them.

“Would she mind if we looked at her garden?” asked Jumbles. “Lisbeth and I should like to see it.”

“I wouldn’t!” protested Mary Elibabeth somewhat tartly. “You may go, if you care to, and I’ll wait for you here. I’m tired, Jumbles.”

“She? Mind?” echoed the ancient, and cackled queerly. “Not she! Lad, there’s many and many a garden ahead of you. Leave this one be.”

“If you’ll only wait for a moment or two, Lisbeth, I’ll be back, truly I will! It’s a garden, you know, and we’ve heaps of time.”

“Oh, I’ll wait—if you’re not gone too long.”

Her heart sank for no reason whatever, and she wished she were going with them. Then they were gone and she made as though to follow, but turned back reluctantly, trying to pretend to herself that she was gladly interested in a blue and golden butterfly that hovered the roses. But as the minutes sped, it seemed that Jumbles had been absent for hours, and when the half of an hour was fretted through she felt she should take

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to the highway without him; and when an hour had elapsed, she marveled that the sun was yet so high. Vexation had given place to foreboding—nay, to certainty. Then Mary Elizabeth knew well what she must do, and with her head lifted she marched stiffly under the trellis and down the path. And in a trice she had traveled it, to enter the garden of La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

Have ever you dreamed a garth, a garden, like to one that might have been in an old, old Irish fairy tale—lovely as enchantment, as witchery, having all of foliage and flower that heart could wish? It was such a garden as that, ringed with the solemn trees of the forest, watered by a hesitant, coy brook, and the sweet sod of it was blossomed white clover, thickly dotted with white, giant puffballs. There were paths of gray flagstones, with peony and iris beside them. The breath of alyssum and honeysuckles was over the garden, and its hollyhocks were tall and regal as queens. Indeed, it was that veritable garden of desire, which even the seedsmen cannot portray in their well calculated raptures. At another time Mary Elizabeth would have seen only the garden, and nothing more, in her hunger for the beauty and spell of the place—but now she saw naught of the garden, as she stood at its border, flanked there by flowering cherries. She saw the two of them, first of all, and only—Jumbles and the woman that is called La Belle Dame Sans Merci. They were beside a pool in which a fountain played. They were speaking one to another in low voices. Toward them Lisbeth hastened.

The woman was gowned in pale apricot, and her hair, hued like honey, was plaited and bound in heavy silken braids about the delicate smallness of her ears, from which jet sparkled and swung. Yes, there was a golden, minted radiance above the milken pallor of her

face, and the sweetly enigmatic curving of her lips was red as bloodstain; and her eyes—lifting under their long dark lashes—were blue as cornflowers, blue as the summer sea, blue as a June heaven, though none of these might ever be blue beside them. Such were the eyes she lifted to Mary Elizabeth, and in them was a faint, fatigued amusement. Now the girl marked, with that sadness only women know, that Jumbles had no least glance for her, but dwelt upon the face of the woman as a spaniel might.

“Wherever did you come from, child?” asked La Belle Dame Sans Merci. The voice was husky, deep, drawling. The voice was honeyed as the hair.

“I came for my friend,” answered Lisbeth. “We were going somewhere, and it is time we were getting along.”

Then Jumbles spoke, but without turning his gaze away from that beautiful pallor, that scarlet mouth, that crown of golden braids. His voice, far more than what he said, confirmed Mary Elizabeth’s quite positive apprehensions.

“Isn’t she wonderful?” breathed the boy.

“Come along, Jumbles.” Ah, were the words light enough? Were they lightly uttered? “We’ve such a long way before us, and it’s growing late.” Then to the woman: “We’re awfully glad to have seen such a nice garden, Jumbles and I.”

“Isn’t she wonderful?” breathed Jumbles again.

She yearned to scream at him. To shake and shake him fiercely. And La Belle Dame Sans Merci knew this well enough. She laughed throatily to think of it. Now her eyes were flecked with the bright chillness of the sea in winter sunshine.

“Isn’t she—”

“Jumbles!”

“Wonderful?”



"Isn't she wonderful?"

"I fear me, little girl, you must walk on without this boy, or home again to your dusting. Cannot you see how it is with him?"

"For shame! How can you? At least you might not talk so while he listens! Yes, while he listens, like a great ninny!"

"And you also, Lisbeth!" laughed the woman. "Now, I, at least, have called him no hard names. Not I. That is, I've called him anything but ninny, though it's apt enough. Be not afraid of his hearing us, however. He hears only as I wish it, and not otherwise."

As though to yield proof of this, the afflicted Jumbles droned his admiration once more—oh, maddeningly.

“There’s ditching to be done.” La Belle Dame Sans Merci was odiously reflective. “He’d be useful for that. Poor John the gardener isn’t so spry any more. There’s a new dove cote to build. And John is no carpenter. And then—and then—let me see. I might send him away, as I have sent them all, to search for the flower that cannot fade nor wither.”

“You are a selfish, cruel woman!” cried Mary Elizabeth. “Oh, what can I do?”

The laughter of La Belle Dame Sans Merci sweetened the garden hatefully.

“Why, child, of course I am. But when I have the flower that grows by that lost spring the Spaniard sought, I shall drink of its essence and be changeless!”

“Send John, then, or somebody else.” The girl was pleading. “Only don’t send Jumbles, please. Oh, please.”

“There’s naught for it, little girl. There’s no helping it. He must go.”

“But you’ve just said they never come back.”

La Belle Dame Sans Merci shrugged her shoulders. It was sufficient to set Jumbles moaning again.

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“Well,” observed Lisbeth, and her heart lifted, “I can’t say that I blame them.”

There was laughter in her heart, for all its sad perplexity. That shaft went home. More than this, the flush that tinted the pallor of the woman’s face, the anger that flashed and was hidden in her eyes, gave to Mary Elizabeth a restored confidence.

“Isn’t she wonderful?” breathed the hapless Jumbles.

“Listen to me, child,” urged La Belle Dame Sans Merci, “and be well advised. Turn home again to your dusting and your dishes. Go back to Horsefoot and your sweetbrier, to Yowler and to Dewey. For you see how it is with him.”

“I shan’t!”

“I have wasted my patience upon you!” The woman’s voice was calmly final. “You may do as you please.”

“Oh, I shall, never fear.” And all the way was simply, suddenly, plain before her.

Swiftly as a glancing swallow, and quite as gracefully, Mary Elizabeth stooped to a vast puffball, whitely perfect in that perfection of cool, white

clover.

“Catch!” cried she, and cast the puffball.

It has long been established, in conduct studiously noted and set down by the savants, that if you toss a puffball to anyone they must endeavor to catch it—however alien such disport would be to their more reflective inclinations. La Belle Dame Sans Merci was not an exception to this broadly human rule, and though she did not catch the puffball, she truly tried to do so—with the result that she herself was cast to the clover, where dignity and grace briefly deserted her. One honey-hued plait was loosened. Ah, rapture! There was a grass stain on the pallor, and another on the apricot gown. We may assume she scrambled not so

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readily to her feet—but Mary Elizabeth was invincible and elate.

“Catch!” She tossed another puffball. The beautiful one lurched to evade it, and clutched at the swift whiteness in vain. She made a furious gesture of refusal. But the golden braid was sagging ludicrously now, and—as heaven is good to us—yet another plait was separate from that harmony! Oh, ecstasy! The girl was heartless.

“Catch this one!”

To do exact justice to La Belle Dame Sans Merci, it must be chronicled that she made thereafter the best of it, and hither and thither the two of them raced and leaped, tossing the white puffballs at one another. But while this exercise proved marvelously beneficial to Mary Elizabeth, brimming her eyes with merriment, mantling her cheek with a flush altogether admirable to perceive, it wrought a far less desirable effect on the wonderful La Belle Dame Sans Merci. The milken pallor of her countenance was streaked now with honest moisture, her blueness of eye was a wild, hunted frenzy, and her honey-hued plaits were in riotous dishevelment. She seemed—she did, indeed—positively untidy. And the girl leaped, and twirled, and tossed her arms as water flows or the breeze runs, while the woman was astoundingly angular and inept of movement. The apricot gown was torn and disarranged. Her breathing was like to the gasping of a perch in the creel. But stop she could not, save only when Lisbeth judged there had been enough of it, and somewhat more than enough. And this was when Jumbles cried out, in his old, accustomed tone—assertive, scornful, certain—as La Belle Sans Merci grasped vainly at a hurtling puffball:

“Muffed!”

They confronted one another, and Mary Elizabeth

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was confident she had won. For Jumbles appeared to be quite himself again. He was laughing at them in a most superior manner. The art of La Belle Dame Sans Merci was, however, not any common art. More swiftly than thought her hands moved through the riot of her hair, touched at her heated face, tugged at the disheveled gown. And there she stood again—even the girl must confess—quite lovely, calm and wonderful, though panting slightly. Here was a very real peril! Slowly into the boy’s laughter, over the curve of his lips, the honesty of his eyes, Lisbeth discerned the enchantment to be creeping. She glanced about most desperately. Then was heaven truly good to her, and the whispered word of her instructress redeemed, for munching at clover blossoms, and not a step distant, was a brown little rabbit. A wild woods rabbit. The rabbit! Ah, fancy it!

Mary Elizabeth knew at once what she must do, and she did it without slightest hesitation or compunction. She took up the rabbit into her arms, rubbed its cool, twitching nose with her own, and kissed it between its flattened, velvet ears. She whispered to it, and the rabbit blinked.

“I didn’t know you had a rabbit!” she exclaimed.

“It’s not my rabbit, Lisbeth!” The denial was needlessly positive. “I’ve never seen it before!”

“Well, anyway, it’s a perfect darling of a rabbit, and I’m sure you’ll love it.” Lisbeth held the rabbit toward the beautiful one. “Here.”

“Oh, I couldn’t! Please take it away! Please do! I couldn’t!”

“What’s wrong with rabbits?” This was Jumbles, and his tone was happiness to the girl. He was glowering politely at La Belle Dame Sans Merci, as though he couldn’t for the life of him understand her. “Give

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me that old rabbit, Lisbeth.” He grasped it by the ears. It swung meekly and without protest from his fist. “That’s the proper way to hold a rabbit,” said Jumbles. “But you put your hand under them here.” He had seated the rabbit in his left palm. “Now, that’s right. Why don’t you like rabbits, ma’am? I thought everybody liked rabbits.”

“I’m afraid of them,” faltered La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

Jumbles sniffed most politely. His sniff spoke volumes. And Lisbeth sighed. But it was a happy, relieved, rather weary small sigh. Only then did she realize how marvelously, compellingly glorious was that garden. Thus the three were silent for a space, in which Jumbles freed the wild rabbit that it might finish its dinner. His look was puzzled as he regarded La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

“We ought to be going,” he said. “But I’m thinking. There’s something very familiar about you. Let me think.”

So they permitted him to think, and in that stillness was heard the munching sound the rabbit made, and the low humming of bees above the clover.

“Now I have it!” cried Jumbles. “You remind me ever so much of Miss Tinkham back home. I went to her in the second grade, and she’s been teaching there far longer than I can remember. You’re the very image of her!”

“Does she quote from the verses of Will Carlton?” inquired La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

“Does she!”

“Through her nose? Rolling her eyes in this manner?”

Jumbles struck a languid, drooping posture, rolled

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his eyes calfishly and intoned through his nose this verse:

Over the hills to the poor house I’m trudging my weary way—
I, a woman of seventy, and only a trifle gray—
I, who am smart and chipper, for all the years I’ve told,
As many another woman that’s only half as old.

“And always cries when she recites,” he added.

“It might be,” mused La Belle Dame Sans Merci. “It must be. There couldn’t be two of them. Tell me, Jumbles, is she a slimsy, limp person, all elbows, with taffy-colored hair?”

“Why, that’s the very picture of her!”

“It ought to be.”

The woman seemed fondly reflective. She might have been turning years, like yellowed leaves in an album. “Land sakes! It ought to be. She’s

Imogene, my youngest sister, and I haven't seen her for—yes, I'll out with it—for twenty years and more."

"Isn't the world a small place, after all?" inquired Lisbeth with great satisfaction.

"Gosh, yes," agreed Jumbles. "Just imagine! Then you won't mind if I call you Miss Tinkham, will you?"

"Bless your heart, no!" laughed Miss Tinkham's sister. "They say I am without pity, which isn't true, but nobody ever shall say I haven't a sense of humor!"

As naturally as though the three were old, dear friends, they found themselves walking slowly across the garden, chatting pleasantly. A whippoorwill called. There was the zooming of night-hawks in pursuit of luckless moths. Why, bless you, it was early twilight in the garden, and before them was a small cottage of white and green, with a roof of varicolored slates, and a jasmine flower starring its verandah. It was evening in the forest beside the highway. Soft, meditative, melancholy, sweeter than bird-song or violin, they heard

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the twilight tones of a lone cow-bell. The ancient gardener, himself a creature of evening, so mistily he moved, was bearing his spade toward a second and smaller cottage set against the forest like an odd, large mushroom. "You've simply got to stay for dinner," declared Miss Tinkham's sister.

They dined upon strawberries, sugar and cream, the four of them, by mellow candlelight, in a room as daintily pretty, and prim, as any that is pictured in the floral magazines. And they lingered at table for a long while, laughing a very great deal.

Miss Tinkham's sister apologized for the fare—as she had no need to—and declared that, for her part, she was literally starving for green corn. But—and she sighed—it was much too early for this.

"Do you grow your own corn?" inquired Jumbles.

"No, we've scarcely room enough," the woman answered. "There's a young farmer who sells green corn, and he comes with it late in summer. I suppose I must wait." She appeared to reflect. "He's a tall young farmer," she explained. "He's so brown and tall."

"What is the name of the corn he grows?" asked Jumbles.

"And that I do not remember," said she.

In no time it was ten by the tall clock, and the clock said as much, in purring, resonant strokes. Then Jumbles and the old gardener were away to find sleep in the gardener's cottage, and as they walked toward it, under the near and tolerant stars, the gardener was saying:

"Sure it is that you can never tell, Jumbles, my boy. But as for myself I'm saying that a man with a fondness for the earth, loving well to dig in it, to bring it to bearing, can't for the life of him be truly a rogue."

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"I suppose that's so, though I never had thought of it," agreed Jumbles.

"Take Cain." The gardener grounded his spade with a soft clang. "Was ever a man so hated by his fellows, and him with the mark upon him? And justly. Yet times I'm grieved for Cain, that's dust these thousands of years, and times I know him well. For Cain was a gardener, and the first gardener of us all. At long last, Jumbles, depend on it, the earth sweetened him and gave sorrow to his black heart, like rainfall. The earth tamed and sweetened him before ever he went back to it. How could it have been otherwise with him, when he was the first gardener, and as such a bit of a poet? How?"

Their voices died away in the darkness. A candle flame leaped into being against the night. The forest was very still. Just the tree-frogs. And now and then an owl.

Toward midnight Miss Tinkham's sister ceased talking to Mary Elizabeth—the two of them resting together under fresh fine linen—and when the sweetly husky voice no longer murmured, nor told more, the room was very still. Drapes wavered dimly at the window. A vine rustled. Lisbeth mused upon the strangeness of the world, and how curiously it serves its pilgrims, and to what doomed tasks it sets them. She mused upon the yesterdays and the tomorrows, until she could not have said whether it was sadness or longing she felt. But this she knew, and surely, that she was so sorry for Miss Tinkham's sister.

"Poor you!" she whispered, and put her young arms about the woman. They slept.

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CHAPTER XVII.

Which tells of the youth whose harvest was song.—And of his boldness toward Mary Elizabeth.—Together with authentic versions of the songs he made.—Of how a certain song roused Jumbles to protest and earned for him a slight but honorable wound.—Of their farewell to the Troubadour and of the prophecy he uttered.

ON a morning of song sparrows and chipmunks, each saluting heaven after the manner of its kind, the travelers took leave of the woman, and of the old gardener. They were loth to quit the garden, for friendship dwelt there, and the garden itself was beautiful beyond any they had ever beheld. Nor had Mary Elizabeth the least fear of that place, after sleep. The hours of dreams had carried away her misgivings, as gently as a loitering current bears spent leaves seaward. Her heart was warm toward the woman of the honey-hued hair, that is called La Belle Dame Sans Merci, for whom she felt a pity and a tenderness well nigh maternal. They kissed one another upon the lips, those two, while Jumbles and the old gardener had a last word of the garden mysteries.

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“Compost!” exclaimed the gardener. “Mind well what I’m telling you, boy. The secret of it is in compost. And you’ll be making this of anything and of everything, as you make life.”

“Goodby, Lisbeth!”

“Goodby!”

“Goodby, Jumbles!”

“Goodby, Miss Tinkham!”

For a country mile or more they walked almost without speech. It would be a drowsy day. Thus early in the morning the air was sweetly warm and listless, burdened by fragrances it could neither abandon nor summon a breeze to bear far and far from there—to windows where white, sun-starved faces look hungrily out upon deserts of roofs, and, if God is good to them, upon thin but valiant red geraniums potted in tin-cans. Through Lisbeth's thought was woven a glad wistfulness, for she knew of what Jumbles was thinking. And this she knew as surely as though he talked with her. Because of this knowledge she was both glad and wistful, yet she kept secret from him the gift that was so newly hers. As they walked, voiceless, the sun crept toward mid-heaven, where he flamed like a sea-king's targe, and silken fabrics of warmth were spun of sunshine and cobbles, to waver as watery flame in the windless day. Three quail were bathing in the dust of a ditch. They did not fly. The travelers passed a gray fox panting on green mosses. He would not run. And after a very great while Jumbles spoke.

"We say goodbye to people so often," said Jumbles to himself.

"But it's ever so much nicer to say it than not to," answered Lisbeth. "Think of not having said goodbye to someone."

"I'm thinking."

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"They'd be wondering why you didn't say goodbye, and if it had been for any fault of theirs. And you'd be thinking that you should have said goodbye. It would hurt you quite as much as it would hurt them."

"That isn't it entirely, Lisbeth. Just to say goodbye is a hurt in itself. If you could see the hearts of people, you'd find them scarred all over with goodbyes. That's what I was thinking."

"But every scar is dear to them, and they wouldn't part with one for all the world. Don't you understand? There are two sorts of hurts, the good ones and the bad ones. When you really say goodbye, and mean it, that is a good hurt and you keep it for always."

"Well, maybe." Jumbles was not wholly convinced. "But I think it could have been managed better."

"Oh, everybody thinks that!" The girl laughed. "Yet if it had been managed in any other way, then we shouldn't have any such word. And it's a beautiful word. There isn't a more beautiful word in the world."

"There's hello," said Jumbles.

“Now you’re being silly, and you know it.” Lisbeth danced ahead of him and turned to face the boy. “Look at me, Jumbles!”

And Jumbles looked. It seemed to him that there were three freckles grouped on her nose, but he could not keep count. It seemed to him that her eyes were mist-gray, as a cool dawn on sleeping waters, but even while he pondered this they were swept by a breeze of lightest mockery, and small glints and glimmerings shone in them, so that he was not certain of their hue. It seemed to him that her dark hair was brightly tendriled, and that it must be soft to the touch, and have an odor of flowers, but the fancy passed as her lips parted in a smile. It seemed to him that her lips—and Lisbeth laughed until the forest was sweet with laughter.

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So Jumbles stood and looked at her, and he was somewhat aggrieved. For scarce did he know what he had been thinking, yet he suspected that she knew.

“All right,” said Jumbles. “I’m looking.”

“Then say goodby to me!”

“What?” He uttered the question slowly.

“I mean, let’s pretend, Jumbles—for the music of it, the music that is in the word. Bid me goodby!”

“Now, Lisbeth, you listen to me. You know very well—”

“Oh, bother listening to you, Jumbles. Say it as I say it, after me. Say ‘Goodby, Lisbeth’.”

“I shan’t.”

“Please, Jumbles! You won’t ever know, unless you do. Is this any way to act about an argument? Please.”

“No.”

But the girl caught at his tone, for there was that in it which denied the negative, and very softly she spoke to him. So softly did she speak, the trees themselves were breathless to listen, and there was a bird that ceased singing.

“Please, Jumbles! Say it after me, as I say it. Say ‘Goodby, Lisbeth’.”

Now the boy’s face was flushed with this nonsense, and his eyes were vexed with something like to sulkiness. He kicked at a cobble impatiently. But there was naught for it. His gaze fell.

“Goodby, Lisbeth.”

Then his heart clamored suddenly, and his lips parted as though to cry out, and he was conscious of a fear he might not name, while at the same time there was a yearning in his throat he never had known before, and a voice in his ears he had not heard—although it was his own. Whereat his flush deepened and his petulance mounted. She was not laughing then. Her eyes

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were gray once more as mist on sleeping waters, and they regarded him for a moment. Mary Elizabeth turned aside, nor might she look at him, but must seem taken with a wayside columbine.

“There’s your goodbye for you!” exclaimed Jumbles. “And we’ve wasted time enough at it. It’s only a word, after all, when you don’t mean it.”

“I know it is, Jumbles,” agreed Mary Elizabeth with meekness. “We were just pretending.” He was so masterful again, and striding onward so stoutly, he did not glimpse the smile that curved her mouth for an instant.

Jumbles was silent thereafter, and Lisbeth did not venture to speak to him—since this, too, was a wisdom that had been whispered her at Horsefoot. They trudged on resolutely, for all that the day grew well-nigh breathless with heat. And nothing of any moment befell them until the hour was near noon and they were come to the stone wall that has its corner under three tall pines. As they approached the wall they heard a voice singing, and the throbbing, nasal music of a stringed instrument. It was a gay voice and youthful, and it sang with strength and lightness, nor was there the least difficulty in following the words of the song. And these were the words the voice sang:

When I am done with wandering,
With having and with squandering,
When I am quit of easy loves,
And of the false loves, too—
Though sick at heart of blundering,
All travel-worn yet wondering,
A jest to every maid I meet,
I’ll search the world for you!

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When all my songs go wavering,
And this my voice is quavering;
When I have quested round the world,
And it so strange with care—
God pity then the singing tongue
That lightly vowed when I was young,
And pity him who sought for you
Too late to find you there!

The coolness and shadow of the wall beneath the three tall pines reached out to them gently as the voice died away, and they saw the singer lounging in that grateful shade, his back to the wall, one slim leg outthrust, one knee updrawn. He was clad very much as had been Sir Marmaduke's squire, though all in brown velvet, worn and travel-stained. Beside him lay a brown cap with a brown dragged feather, and a small wallet also, and the instrument on which he played. He was perhaps some few years older than Jumbles, but very dark of eye and skin, with a trace of silken black mustache. At sight of them, standing to stare, he sprang to his feet and made Mary Elizabeth a low and thrilling bow.

"Why tarry you there in the sun?" he cried. "Come share this shade with me!"

So they entered the shadow and coolness of the wall and pines as they had been stepping into cool, delightful water, and gladly enough they sat down beside the youth, knowing then for the first time how weary they were. Distant above them was the low and intimate conversation of the three comrade trees—the voices that are like sighing without sadness.

"A trace of summer," said the youth idly. "She kisses the world toward its harvest."

"It's a warm day for this time of year," agreed Jumbles. "But it's the finest of growing weather."

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"All weathers are one to me, who am a husbandman of sorts. But if there is a weather that is unsuited to my purpose, it is this." And the youth yawned with a whiteness of perfect teeth.

"Surely you don't wish us to believe that you are a farmer?" said Mary Elizabeth with interest.

“Why, truly I am little else,” he answered, yawning again. “But on such a day as this I shirk my calling sadly.”

“What would you be growing?” asked Jumbles doubtfully.

“Songs.”

“Songs?” repeated Mary Elizabeth happily.

“’Tis a crop that makes its lustiest growth in April,” explained the youth, “when it may be harvested thrice a day, like to the purple flower of the Medes that is shorn thrice in a season. Yes, songs. In autumn, too, are brave days for the growing of songs, when the country air is a vintage, and the songs are of tourney and far journeyings.”

“But songs aren’t crops,” said Jumbles scornfully. “You can’t feed people with rhymes and tunes.”

“Say you so?” The seeming question was lazily disinterested. “Consider then the siege of Belclaire stronghold, when all food was gone, and there was scarce a starved rat remaining to make broth for our wounded. So brave a crop of song I grew in those lean days, with death hammering hourly at the gates, that wearied men were comforted and full-fed. By song we made shift somehow to keep the count’s knights and archers at their distance, until we heard the brave trumpets of our lord’s kinsman. Ho, song is a food for the heart when the heart hungers! Nor is there aught else that matters greatly. You were thinking of stomachs.”

Jumbles sat frowning at him, but Lisbeth listened

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eagerly, her lips parted, her eyes shining. The youth plucked at his lute, and the string twanged like a bow-cord.

“You wouldn’t be gathering many songs if it weren’t for those other harvests that farmers reap,” declared Jumbles.

“That’s true enough,” was the unperturbed response. “In a great hall, the hearth blazing, when belts were loosened after meat, I have harvested the songs of winter. And these, as all the others, were made possible by plowshares. I should be last to deny it. But yet—”

“Yet what?”

“Each to his own harvest,” answered the youth. “And I to mine.”

Mary Elizabeth did not trouble to conceal her admiration, for long since she had guessed that the youth was in truth a troubadour—and she had thought never to see one. Jumbles could not find the word for it, nor would he endeavor. He gazed moodily at the lute.

“Have ever you heard of Ermengarde of Narbonne?” the Troubadour asked of Lisbeth.

“No, I have not heard,” she answered. Jumbles glanced at her sharply. The words were unnecessarily low. She regarded the stranger with an interest he could not approve.

“I have made songs to her,” said the Troubadour. “She was of a beauty well suited to song. One might praise her throat alone for a thousand lines of rhyming, and yet leave his task unfinished. The sighs that have been breathed for her would waft the navies of the world far to sea. Men who looked too long in her eyes forgot their vows of knighthood, forgot all such as may have waited for them, and speedily, or at long last, forgot this life itself. I have made songs to her.”

“Yes?” breathed Mary Elizabeth.

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“But since I am a troubadour I sang them without scath to myself, as I sang to an hundred others. Shall I tell you why it is I speak of Ermengarde?”

Mary Elizabeth fixed her look upon the litter of pine needles, and twined her fingers nervously. Jumbles glanced narrowly from one to the other. He would have spoken, but he knew not what to say. They seemed unaware that he was with them.

“Then I will tell,” said the Troubadour slowly. “It is because you are more beautiful, or will be, than this woman who held our sunny Provence to heel. It is because in her was resident a temper darker than her eyes, from which sparks flew on occasion as from the eyes of lions, while in you is the mildness and wonder of Provence in April, when the grapes put forth. And this is in your eyes, Lisbeth.”

Then Jumbles would have risen, for there was a heat on his temples that was not of the sun. He would have spoken, for anger tugged at his tongue. But since they seemed not to be aware of his presence, he neither rose nor spoke.

“Of course,” said Mary Elizabeth, after a moment, “it isn’t true. It couldn’t possibly be. You feel you have to say it because you are a troubadour. And that is why I don’t mind your saying it, though I should.”

“Of course, you should!” exclaimed Jumbles. But they paid him no heed.

“Have you been told that the flush on your cheek is very like the hue of an opening grape leaf? No? Shake not your head so earnestly. I tell you this. The hue of a young grape leaf in Provence, when it is April and our shepherds are away to the hills.”

“I wish you wouldn’t,” sighed Lisbeth.

“Nay, but you wish I would,” answered the Troubadour happily. “Girl, you would love my Provence, field

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and tree, hasty water and idle, the courts of song, the brave joustings, and the coming home from wars.”

Mary Elizabeth had parted her lips again, her eyes were raised to the look the Troubadour had for her, and she leaned slightly toward him.

“I’ve never before,” she said slowly, “been away from Back of Beyond.”

“There’s enough of this!” exclaimed Jumbles. He might not have been beside them, for all the heed they took.

“Who has not been to Provence does not know the full savor of life,” declared the Troubadour. “It is in Provence all the tales are told, and all the songs are sung.”

“But you are not in Provence now.”

“In this you are mistaken, maiden, since a glad heart contrives its own country. In England I have been, and thrice to Venice. I have visited the court of the Soldan. And always the place where I tarried was Provence. But I say to you, if you must cleave to exactness, that here is Provence as never I have known it... Provence is where you are.”

“Sing then, won’t you?” asked the girl eagerly. “Sing something for me here, if this is Provence.”

“What would you have me sing?”

“I liked the song you were singing when we came up the highway,” she answered. “Sing it again.”

The Troubadour lowered his bold gaze.

“I sang no song as you came up the highway,” he said.

And Mary Elizabeth did not press the point, though she knew well enough that she had heard him singing. Nay, almost she could have repeated the very words.

“Well, anything then,” she said.

The Troubadour took up his lute and wrought a

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low, vagrant sweetness upon it. And presently of this was born the melody, and as the melody quitted the strings he lifted his voice and sang. And these were the words of the song:

Now the rose it requireth no more than an hour
From the bud to the blossom, the dream to the flower;
There is dew on the web and the web's on the thorn,
But the sun waketh roses when morning's at morn!

O country lass, country lass, cannot you see
As it is with the roses so is it with me?
For my heart it was barren, my heart it was vain,
My heart was as chill as a leaf in the rain—

My heart it was dark as a leaf in the night
Till you came like the morning when morning is bright,
And out of the darkness and out of the dew
You wakened the rose that has blossomed for you!

For the rose it requireth no more than an hour
From the bud to the blossom, the dream to the flower—
Oh, country lass, country lass, cannot you see
As it is with the roses so is it with me?

Then Lisbeth looked long at her travel-worn shoes, and there was a rent in one of them, while the Troubadour looked long and boldly at Lisbeth. But neither the girl nor the singer had so much as a glance for Jumbles, who watched the slow crimson dye her cheek, and who regarded the Troubadour blackly.

“It's pretty; awfully pretty,” sighed Lisbeth after a while.

“Why shouldn't it be?” asked the Troubadour, with complacence. “I tell you straightly that I, who have made songs to Ermengarde of Narbonne, am at my best in the simpler and sincerer themes. And, maiden, this song of ours has a virtue you have not remarked.”

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“And what might that be, Troubadour?”

“It was sung truly!”

“Oh!”

Now the Troubadour leaned a little aside and drew his wallet to him from the grass. He opened it to extract therefrom, and with most evident satisfaction, a goose feather fashioned as a pen, a small crystal phial of ink, stoppered with a silver griffin, and a square of curiously stiff, thick paper, that seemed unlike any paper they ever had seen. And, dipping quill to ink, he spread the paper on his wallet and poised the pen, smiling at the girl as he did so. The smile was a question.

“Oh, very much!” cried Lisbeth gladly. “Indeed, I should!”

The Troubadour wrote slowly, but with grace. The script that flowed from the quill was most unusual, outlandish, and extraordinary. It seemed, even while the ink was fresh, to have been written long and long ago, and as they watched it form and gather, line after flowing line, the darkness of the ink was softened to a tone of rust, until the verses seemed always to have been written, so ancient did they appear. He ended with a flourish, frowned at the final words, to see if they were dried, and gave the paper to the girl.

“Look here!” exclaimed Jumbles, but they paid him no heed.

“In my own Provence, as I was saying,” resumed the Troubadour, “there is—but it pleases me, by your leave, maiden, to make another song of that which I have to tell.” He outstretched his hand for the lute.

Jumbles was on his feet, and glowering. He struggled for the hot, swift words that would not come. Only then were they aware of him—Lisbeth with rounded eyes of amazement, and lips pursed in disapproval of

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his manners; the Troubadour with indolent amusement.

“Come here!” cried Jumbles, and beckoning led on the turn of the wall.

“By our Lady!” laughed the Troubadour, “you are short with your speech, nor does it smack of gentleness to one who holds a fief in his own right, and has made songs to Ermengarde!”

He rose with a flash of brown velvet, lithely, and strode after Jumbles. They were hidden from the girl in a moment, and only the low drone of their voices, indistinguishable, came to her where she listened. Only this, for the space of an hundred heart-beats. Then the light mocking laughter of the Troubadour. And a cry of hoarseness in another voice. That would be Jumbles! Oh, that would be Jumbles! There was a thudding of feet moved rapidly. And laughter again. She found herself running toward the turn of

the wall. And as she ran her throat was sanded with fear, and her heart was sick with self-reproach. And as she ran she was angry also—with the loyal anger of fear for a friend.

But they were walking slowly toward her, those two, and though the eyes of Jumbles smouldered, and his breath came pantingly, the Troubadour was smiling. Lisbeth thanked goodness. She thanked goodness, but in that selfsame instant cried out to see the red stain on the boy's throat, above the faded shirt—the small, red stain.

“Jumbles!” Her hands were fluttering over the scratch.

“Leave it be!” he bade her. “It's nothing, you silly!”

“Nav, I but pricked him as he came too near me,” explained the Troubadour. “Of a truth it is nothing. It has not the dignity of a wound.”

“I hate you?” she sobbed. “Please go away, because I shall always hate you.”

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“He goes,” said Jumbles quietly.

“I go,” the Troubadour agreed. “But deal not so harshly with me, maiden. For how was I to know?”

“Know what?” asked Jumbles and Lisbeth as one voice.

“That you were traveling toward the Pool of Tears, you two. Goggle not so at me, sweet innocents. It is thither that you are bound, nor are you there to meet with any disappointment. Would that I also might tarry at that place.”

And though they pressed him, he was not persuaded to say more than this, but clasped his wallet to his belt, tucked his lute beneath his arm, and with a wave of the hand was off down the road. Yet he turned once and called back to them, waving his hand again, ere he disappeared.

“What is it that he says?” puzzled Jumbles.

“I'm sure I misunderstood him,” answered Lisbeth. “It was so far. But I thought he said he should very much like to know how I tame cub bears.”

“That couldn't have been what he said.”

“No, it couldn't.”

They went onward again, unmindful of the sultry afternoon. Jumbles walked lightly, yet with a resolute firmness she had not previously observed. He walked so resolutely, one might almost have said proudly, that dust flew outward as he stepped. But presently his pace slackened, and

pride departed his walking, and it was eloquent of dolor. And Lisbeth knew, with that gift so recently given her, the nature and trend of his thought.

“What is it, Jumbles?” she asked softly.

“It’s only this, Lisbeth,” he said, “I’m afraid I never can write poetry. I seem to want to, and for the past mile I’ve been thinking about it. But there aren’t any rhymes.”

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“Well, there isn’t any paper, either, and there isn’t any pencil. So why worry about it? I’m sure I don’t care.”

“Why, I thought you did! I thought perhaps you did. You kept—”

“I didn’t keep it!”

“You didn’t?”

“Of course, I didn’t! I tore it into the littlest pieces, and I threw them all away.”

“I shouldn’t have cared if you had kept it. Only it seemed so foolish.”

“I know, Jumbles.”

“I’ll tell you, Mary Elizabeth, some day I’ll write you a piece of poetry. It’s probably easy enough.”

“I wish you would, Jumbles.”

“I’ll tell you what, I’ll write you a poem all about Mr. and Mrs. Gaffney, or about what happened in Cockaigne. How’ll that be?”

“Oh, that will be perfectly splendid!” agreed Lisbeth, trying her very best not to seem ungrateful. It was enough that Jumbles should be walking proudly again.

She loitered a pace behind him, and in her hands—brought forth from somewhere—was the paper on which the Troubadour had written. Lisbeth sighed. It was such a shame. It was like hurting something. But tear it she must, and into tatters, as she had said. Otherwise, she would be guilty of a falsehood. Oh, bother. The paper wouldn’t tear. It resisted her fingers, try as she might, and she was in some haste to crumple and cast it into the hazel before Jumbles might perceive her employment.

“Am I walking too fast for you?” asked Jumbles over his shoulder.

“Not at all,” she answered.

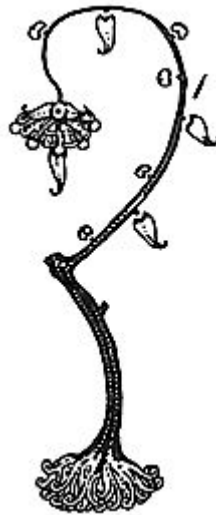
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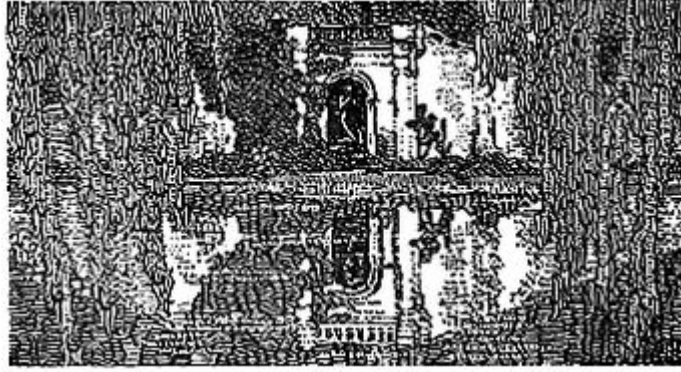
A Thrush found the verses on a Thursday, where they rested in the hazel, and wove them into a nest, which they fitted quite admirably. And the

brood was hatched and fledged, after dream, and the nest was deserted, and rains sought out the rhymes and washed away the words. But that, as you may surmise, was later. And later it was also when the Troubadour rested beside the road, without heart for any song—rested so long and silently that the woods folk crept out to pity him. For the Troubadour had laid his face in his arms, and his thoughts were not of Ermengarde. He was lonely as the last dinosaur.

But as to that time of which one speaks, and more specifically, the hour could not have been much past two in the afternoon, and Lisbeth and Jumbles were tramping down the miles.

The crow could not caw. The hawk could not whistle. The dog could not bark. It was that sort of afternoon.





CHAPTER XVIII.

Of how those two came to the Pool of Tears.—And of the woman who watched beside that singular water.—The story of the pool and its quite extraordinary virtues.—Together with the narrative of Thespia and her great love.— Of how Lisbeth and Jumbles peered into the pool.—And of the reticence of Jumbles.—Who was Thespia?



WONDER now, said Lisbeth as they trudged, “what the Troubadour meant when he spoke of the Pool of Tears. I wonder there really is such a pool. And if there is, where will it be?”

“He may not have meant much of anything, being a poet,” answered Jumbles. “It would take a great deal of tears to make even a small pool. And, of course, a great many people would have to cry in the very same pool. As for me, I don’t believe it.”

“But, Jumbles, you seem to forget how many there are that cry, and how long some of them weep at a time—oh, for hours and hours.”

“That’s foolish.”

“Perhaps, it is foolish—yet they do. And, anyway, Jumbles, if you won’t believe there is such a pool, pray what do you make of that?”

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She had paused and was pointing. Her hair was a dampness of tendrils. Her lips were parted. Her eyes were a brightness of wonder.

“Of what?”

“Of that, to be sure.”

And Jumbles saw the by-path to their right hand, worn smooth by much usage, and over it the bark-thatched bower which housed a small sign of white lettering on a field of green. The words on the sign were:

YE POOL OF TEARS

ACTUAL CONTRIBUTION NOT REQUIRED

MAIN ENTRANCE

He was very much taken aback, as anyone must be who has just declared the non-existence of that which rises to confute him. And scarce did he know what to say, by reason of which when he at length did speak, he spoke rudely.

“Well, what of it?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing. Only I’d like so much to see the pool. It would be very educational. There’s no good in traveling, you know, if you don’t stop to see pools and things. That’s what traveling is for.”

“There’s another hour wasted if we do.”

“But what is the point of saving an hour, Jumbles? And how might you spend it if it were saved? And have you thought, too, that really it might not be wasted?”

When Mary Elizabeth began thus to question him, with inquisitorial precision, he knew that he might as well yield. So he shrugged his shoulders as with indifference, and made the best of it.

“Promise me you won’t cry,” he insisted.

“I shan’t cry, Jumbles.”

And between hedges white with the wild mock-oranges, they came to the Pool of Tears, which has a



Beyond the Pool of Tears

minor meadow to itself—a meadow like a coin fallen in the forest. It proved not a very large pool, being no more than the width of a thought or a dream. It was walled with white marble and this was veined with rose, and all about it were the tall and brilliant flowers that are called everlastings—the immortelles of romance. Over the flowers were a thousand hovering butterflies, and into the flowers were plunged innumerable wild bees and those fat counterfeits, the drone-flies. A singular, charmed water, of a crystalline depth not to be determined at a glance, though far down one perceived the hues of carnelian, and agate, and malachite, with many another shard and pebble colored brightly as the flowers. But the charm of

the pool was peace—a pervasive gentleness that entered one’s veins soothingly.

Beyond the Pool of Tears, on a bench of the rose-veined marble, in an open arbor of vine, was seated a woman who looked at them with dark eyes of gentleness. On her shoulder was perched a green and scarlet parrot. In her lap was a silken skein, and in her hands were ivory needles, and from these there fell away the shift or scarf at which she had been busied. She was slender as maidenhood, but the dark hair was threaded whitely, and there was that about her which bespoke the timeless spinster, as did the plainness of her black satin, with mellow lace at throat and wrist. Her eyes were smiling at them so gently, so understandingly, that they approached the woman almost without diffidence. And when they were near to her she rose and stretched a hand to either. Her voice was deeply beautiful as she gave them greeting.

“I have been expecting you, Lisbeth and Jumbles,” said the woman. “You are somewhat delayed.”

“We shouldn’t have known of the pool, but for the Troubadour,” explained Lisbeth. “You see, he told us

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we must visit it. I think we were very fortunate to meet him, though he wasn’t altogether pleasant.”

“But that was contrived for you, my dear,” answered the mistress of the pool. “One always meets the Troubadour. I hope you didn’t take him too seriously?”

“Of course not!” With a glance at Jumbles, who was visibly fidgeting.

“And now that you are here,” continued the woman, “come sit with me in the shade of the arbor. There. Isn’t the pool lovely to look upon. In sunshine as in cloud?”

“It is very lovely,” answered Lisbeth.

To this moment the parrot had not spoken, and but for the rolling of its curious eyes of gold and ebony, the occasional blinking of these, the travelers should have thought it tranced or carven. Now, however, the bird shuffled to and fro upon the satin shoulder, lifted its wings and spoke.

“Would you look, or would you weep?” cried the parrot.

“Hush, Manuel!” the woman chided. “It is the question that I put so often,” she told the travelers. “But you, it is evident, do not come to weep. A body can see that readily enough. After a time, you may look, if you

choose, but first I should tell the tale of the pool. Shall I tell the tale of the Pool of Tears?"

"Yes, tell us!"

So quiet there. So curiously peaceful. The voice of the woman ran like a slow stream through thought. So low it was that one could hear the fluttering of butterflies above the immortelles. The gentle face of the woman, to which they looked, was that of a friend long known to them. So quiet there.

You may cry like the wind in the night, children—she took up the tale—and your tears will be for this or

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for that, and only time may give solace. Save but for one weeping, one certain grief. And to this grief the pool ministers, even while it receives.

A very great while ago, and once upon a time—so long ago there is no record except belief—there was a maiden who wept in this meadow for a boy that was gone. So truly did she grieve that heaven pitied her, and so constantly did she weep that a small pool was formed of her tears. It was a pool that must have vanished as dew, but for the exceeding pity and clemency of heaven. For they that are in heaven took counsel in their pity for her, that she might somehow be comforted. Thus it was, lifting her face from her arms, she perceived not her own countenance mirrored in the small pool of her tears—but the countenance of the boy that was gone. He smiled at her in the remembered way, as though they two could not be far apart, however fate might order, or winds waft, or even death decree. And she smiled back at him, and was consoled. Such was the beginning of the Pool of Tears.

Now this is the property of the pool, as you must know, that only those who weep truly, and who love well, may find solace here. And to the pool, since ever those first tears were shed, maidens and youths have journeyed, from near and from far, to have their own again and to know truth. One may not see falsely here, for this is forbidden. It is a pool of tears that have been truly shed for love, and these were young tears mostly, and so it is that the pool is of a clarity not elsewhere to be equaled.

("Like the wind in the night!" exclaimed the parrot.)

("Hush, Manuel!")

Yes, you should know beyond doubting that the pool is not to be deluded. Of this, also, there is a tale that must be told—the story of the

maiden Thespia, who

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came to the pool in her great need and found a sorrow here she had not thought to find. Yet she found solace also. It is the story of the coming of Thespia to this place.

Long and long ago in her own country—which need not be named—this Thespia was more beautiful than any maiden ever known. So it was said of her in those times. Fortunate as she was beautiful, Thespia lacked for nothing of the happiness of life, and wheresoever she journeyed in that country the people were glad to see her, and to rejoice in her beauty.

“It is Thespia!” they would cry, and she would smile at them full fondly, thinking she loved them well.

Poor lass! It had been better for her to be born to the peasantry, and to toil in the fields, and to eat of curds and oaten bread—but this she could not know. For sorrow had not touched her, nor any want, and she was Thespia.

There dwelt also in that country the youth to whom she was promised. He was called Rupert of the Blade, in token of his birth, and strength, and fearlessness. And as Thespia was good to look upon, in her maidenhood, so was he first among all youths in comeliness, in valor and in gentle deeds. Ah, Rupert! Rupert! You were first. They were betrothed, and all their people, nobles and commoners, yeomanry and serfs, were happy in this happiness. There was much broaching of casks. There was dancing in the streets. And oxen were roasted upon giant spits. Then Thespia looked upon Rupert of the Blade—so fine and smiling—and thought she loved him well. She looked upon her people, and her heart was warm with a very pleasing affection.

(“Ah, Rupert! Rupert!” The parrot called from the woman’s shoulder.)

(“Hush, Manuel!”)

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They were to be wedded a year and a day from then, and it seemed to Thespia there was time enough and to spare for the getting of the silver slippers. These were to be had only in a walled city of Arabia, where naught in human form had dwelt for centuries. From the dark quest of them many an adventurer had not returned, nor ever had been heard of afterward. Yet Thespia believed in Rupert of the Blade, and dearly she desired the

slippers for her bridal. For never another maiden might wear such slippers to the church—and she was Thespia.

“Rupert,” she faltered, “I scarce dare ask it of you. And yet—and yet—”

“Is it the slippers, fairest?” he urged.

“Ah, me!” sighed Thespia.

Then Rupert of the Blade looked to his war-gear, and had a solemn blessing of the priest, and was shriven against mortal mishap, and rode away into the eye of morning. And for a twelve-month Thespia walked with bended head, while folk looked at her pityingly as they whispered of the mission that had been undertaken for love. To Thespia it was as though no other love, since love began, had been so goodly and so dear as theirs. And in a year and a day, to the very hour, Rupert came riding out of the eye of evening, his charger jaded and spent, his mail rusted and worn, while on his young face was the look of one who may not tell that which he has seen and dared. He placed the sliver slippers in her hands.

“Long life to the Princess Thespia!” shouted the people. “Long life to Rupert of the Blade!”

But Thespia put off the bridal, sighing to do so, while vowing that she loved him dearly. And when he pressed for the reason she made answer that a people of the upper Nile wove fabric of moonbeams, so it had been

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told her, and of these fashioned bodices for their brides. Now many were the youthful nobles that had gone thither, along that terrible water, where dead kings keep living guard, in search of the tribe that weaves from moonbeams—but not any had returned. And no bride in all the world, apart from this people—unless it might be Thespia—ever would go to her bridal in a bodice half so fine. And might they not wait for yet a year and a day?

“Is it the bodice of woven moonbeams, fairest?” urged Rupert of the Blade.

“Ah, me!” sighed Thespia.

Then was Rupert of the Blade blessed a second time by the priest, and solemnly shriven, ere he tossed saddle to his charger, tightened the girth with strong young arms, and rode away into the eye of morning. And for a twelve-month Thespia walked with downcast head, musing upon the splendor and beauty of their love, while the people watched her with exceeding pity, and whispered one to another that this love was like to those that are told of the golden days. And in a year and a day, to the hour,

the people heard the plodding of a charger's weary hooves, and ran to shout a welcome to Rupert of the Blade, riding once more out of the eye of evening. His mail was all but shorn from him, and rust and thrust had bitten deep into the iron—but he laid the bodice of woven moonbeams in the waiting hands of Thespia, and dropped to knee that he might kiss her fingers. He was utterly forespent.

“Long life to the Princess Thespia!” shouted the people. “Long life to Rupert of the Blade!”

And he was for the bridal that same twilight, but Thespia shook her dark head, and looked at him most wistfully. Now when he sued for the reason she made answer that there grows an enchanted flower on an island

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midway of ocean, nor elsewhere may it ever be found, and that the apothecaries of this island distill from the flower a scent of languor and of loveliness, such an essence as a bride might trace against a tress, on the day of her bridal. It was well known that many a high-hearted youth had sought the island of the flower, to barter for the essence, but of these not one ever had returned to his maiden. For in that part of ocean the waves are of uncommon wildness, and the sea spews up vast creatures that contend against ships, while as for the island some say that its apothecaries themselves are—that they are—but of this it is not well to speak. Had Thespia this essence for her bridal, no bride in all the world might say as much, quite as no bride save Thespia might walk with Rupert to the priest. Was she not Thespia? And should they not wait for yet a year and a day?

“Is it the essence of the island flower, my fairest?” urged Rupert of the Blade.

“Ah, me!” sighed Thespia.

Then was he shriven for the third time, and blessed against all harm to body or to soul, and a prayer went up from the people as he rode away into the eye of morning. And for a twelve-month Thespia waited him, walking with modesty and lowered gaze, thinking upon the wonder of their great love, while round about her ran the whisper that never—not even in the golden days—had any love been half so great as this. And the year and a day were gone—but never rode Rupert of the Blade out of the eye of evening. Nor ever thereafter. The pity for Thespia knew no bounds, as time passed laggardly, for it was reasonable to assume that so great a love must

have a sorrow to match it, and the hearts of the people were desolate for her. Their hearts were all the more desolate when she lifted up her head, to

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look at life with eyes that were tranced and wounded, and move as a shadow might among the living. For long she did not speak to any, nor word, nor syllable, but on a day when it was grievously certain—by reason of wreckage that mariners had brought inland—there was to be no returning of Rupert, she found low voice again.

“I must make my pilgrimage to the Pool of Tears,” said she.

They made her ready for that pilgrimage, and to this very pool she came on a white palfrey. There were many that came with her to be witness to her grief and solace. But all held pityingly aloof while Thespia walked, with bended head, toward the pool. And a whisper ran softly through the watching company, in exceeding sorrow for her great love and loss. She knelt beside this water that is tears.

(“Would you look, or would you weep?”)

(“Hush, Manuel!”)

Yes, by this very pool she knelt, and as she did so it was in her thought that never, since time began, were love and loss so great as hers. She knelt and wept. And dimly through her tears she perceived the pool to be troubled, as by a rising vapor, and her sad heart leaped to think that presently she would see his face again.

(“Ah! Rupert of the Blade!”)

(“Hush, Manuel!”)

Then the mist wavered, thinned and was gone. A face looked up to hers from the pool, and eyes took counsel with her eyes. And Thespia cried out in sudden terror and in greater loss—for the face was the face of Thespia, and there was naught else in the pool. And this, my pilgrims, is the story I was charged to tell you.

She ceased speaking, and the parrot was motionless on her shoulder. Both Lisbeth and Jumbles were minded

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to demand another ending, but there was that in her manner which restrained them. Moreover, she was gesturing toward the pool.

“You have no reason for weeping, children,” she said, “but look you must, since you are here.”

Lisbeth went readily enough to the pool's margin, while Jumbles hesitated and walked round. But at length each head was bent above the flawless surface. Lisbeth exclaimed in gleeful wonder. There was no cry from Jumbles. He drew back from the water as from harm, and his cheeks were flushed. The mistress of the pool was smiling at them.

"What did you see in the pool, Lisbeth?" asked the pool's mistress, when both had risen.

"I saw—" began the girl eagerly. Jumbles was positively glaring at her. And she shook her head. "Perhaps I only thought it."

"And you, Jumbles?"

"What did you expect I'd see?" countered the boy. "It's only a puddle, after all, even if it is of tears."

Then the mistress of the pool laughed aloud, and Manuel the parrot laughed with her. But Lisbeth did not dare to laugh, and Jumbles was far from wanting to.

"We've got to be getting along," he said to the woman.

"Yes, you must be getting along." She was looking at them strangely. "Go with him, Mary Elizabeth, wheresoever he wishes. The two of you must be getting along."

"I shan't say goodby until I've asked one question," declared Lisbeth.

"What is it, dear?"

"I'd like to know what became of Thespia. Can you tell us?"

"And have you not guessed?"

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"We haven't—have we, Jumbles?"

The mistress of the pool was standing before them, slim and maiden-like, in her gown of black satin, with creamy lace at throat and wrist, the parrot glowing against her hair, her dark, dark eyes regarding them fondly.

"I am she that was called Thespia."





CHAPTER XIX.

In which the travelers hear a medley and come to its source.— Of the woman who watched over the Field of Little-Small Children.—How those three walked through the field.— And of the considerable embarrassment of Jumbles.— Touching also upon the pleased astonishment of Lisbeth. —The woman tells her name.



GOING onward, they spoke of Thespia and the pool for a mile or more, and of the strangeness of her necessity—since she must wait there always, never quitting the enchanted water, because of a selfishness that is past. Jumbles was of the opinion that this is a sad employment, without value to oneself or to another, and joyless beyond all reason. But Lisbeth could not agree with him in the least, nor would she admit to sorrow for the plight of Thespia.

“She is happier there,” said Lisbeth. “She has only to look in the pool when she wishes to be happy.”

“Then you think—”

“Jumbles, I know. It isn’t herself she sees in the pool when she looks. That was ended a great while ago. She sees him looking upward at her, and he tells her that

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she is forgiven. I think he says to her, with a look, that he could not bear to see her wounded and grieving.”

“Just the same, it was all her fault, and there’s no getting round it. So she surely must be sad when she sees him.”

Mary Elizabeth halted to stamp an impatient foot, and though she seemed vexed she was also evidently amused.

“You are ever so stupid, Jumbles!” she exclaimed. “Suppose we do call it sadness. Can’t you understand that there is a sort of sadness which is much happier than happiness? Can’t you?”

“Well, I can’t, and I’m not going to try. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Oh, sense! You are forever wanting to make sense of things. There’s very little worth having that makes sense, as you say. When you try to make sense of anything, you spoil it until it isn’t sensible any longer!”

“Shucks!”

“Oh, shucks yourself!”

It was a disagreement not without interesting possibilities, but ere it was fairly begun they reached that pleasant country where the forest thins into groves, as though it had been parked, and sweeps beautifully down to glimpses of meditative river. And there they paused, as many another before them, to love the sweet curve and slope of it with a look. The hour was toward Ute afternoon.

“Listen!” cried Lisbeth.

“Wild geese are coming to the river!” cried Jumbles.

Together they scanned the sky that was without cloud, and followed the aldered course of the distant river. But there were no migrants high in blue heaven, nor any flock above the stream. They stood in a raptness of silence, as all stand who listen for the wild geese—

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and never was such a gabbling, fluting, exclamatory far clamor as they heard. In truth, it was not unlike the tongues of brant, when these are faring along the skylaness, conversing as they journey, but it was quite evident that the bright medley had more of music in it, more of lightheartedness and melody. It was like to many minor voices without care, almost without words, set to a flow of happy, broken laughter. No, it could not be wild geese.

“Let’s go see,” suggested Jumbles.

Mary Elizabeth made never an answer, save to step forward eagerly, hastening toward the clamor. Somehow, Jumbles had the curious feeling that she knew—that she had guessed.

“What could it be?” he puzzled. “For it must be birds.” “No,” said Lisbeth, “it isn’t birds.”

And clearer, and higher, and happier it became, until their ears were filled with it, and responsive laughter was roused in them—yes, happier,

and higher, and clearer until there was naught else to be heard, not their own footsteps on the cobbles, nor the mirth in their throats. They knew then that it was voices blent with laughter. The highway curved briskly, and the forest was gone from before them. Between forest and river were acres upon swirling acres of little-small children. Acres upon acres of children!

“Oh!” cried Mary Elizabeth.

“Did you ever in your life hear such a noise?” shouted the more practical Jumbles.

A woman moved among the tumbling, tossing, romping, weaving, scurrying, scampering, laughing, shouting little-small children, and the travelers perceived that she was undertaking to join them. But to discover a lane was difficult, for the little-small children hampered and

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hindered her every step. They clutched at her swaying skirts. They tumbled before her slow and careful feet. They upheld their arms to her with laughter, and were as restless and changing as corn in a skillet. She touched a head here, and stroked a cheek there, and lifted this one up from the clover, and gently disengaged the fingers of another, as she came with patience and in comeliness toward the travelers, through the acres of little-small children. At length she won free of them, save for the fringe that attended her, and stood before the two. And she sighed a low sigh—that was wholly of happiness—as she smoothed her gown.

“My goodness!” she said.

Now it should be here related, for any who may prove skeptical, that despite the musical merriment of those innumerable little-small children—the acres and acres of them—it was simple enough to hold speech with her, and to hear with distinctness every word she uttered. Which proves, if it proves anything whatsoever, that the field of children was no common acreage, or that there’s a knack to hearing what is said under such trying conditions, or something. You may riddle it as you please.

“Will you walk with me among them?” she asked the travelers.

The voice of Mrs. Gaffney had been charming, with its nuances of sympathy and comprehension, and the voice of La Belle Dame Sans Merci had possessed rare qualities also. In the voice of Thespia was a clarity, a sweetness, fully comparable to old, fond song. But the voice of the woman who walked among the little-small children was like dawning and twilight

—being of a dearness not comparable to any other, nor ever since the world was fashioned.

And those three walked among the acres of children

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—for how might Jumbles help himself?—while Lisbeth and the woman matched smile for smile, and nod for understanding nod. So near as might be determined—what with the constant weave and play of them—the children were all of an age. They were of that age, when though mishaps and tumbles are a frequent portion, the wonder and freshness of running, and leaping, and laughing—of laughing easily at little or at less—are unmarred and undiminished; of those years when children smile in their sleep, being then engaged in dreams they cannot well remember nor ever quite forget; of that delightful and delighting brief period when a pebble is treasure, the wind has a speech of its own, birds are people, and the moon and the sun are people, too. They were, in fine, of the age that is belief, which some have called innocence.

In simple fairness to Jumbles, one confesses, he measured the width and length of the field with troubled eye, thinking to make a dash for it, before ever he realized how hopeless was his case and resigned himself to move voiceless beside the girl and the woman. But his embarrassment was acute—so much so that he felt it encompass him, as a fever.

“They are all of an age,” the woman was explaining, “for the best possible reason. It is so that one thinks of them, and so that one remembers.”

“Yes, that’s true,” agreed Lisbeth.

“It is so that I remember mine.”

“But I imagined—” and Lisbeth bit her lip.

“My dear! My dear! Am I the old woman that lived in a shoe? Not one of these is mine. I only tend them for a time. I meant to say that it is so I remember my own, when he was of this age. At least, I remember him best in his childhood, as a little-small boy, rather grave,

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and filled with the gravest, odd questions. He grew to manhood all too soon for me.”

“Has he gone away from you?”

“No,” the woman answered reflectively. “He is nearer to me than ever, and dearer, too, I might say, if you will only understand that he was dearer then.”

“I think I understand how that could be, but it’s not simple to give a reason.”

“It’s far from simple,” agreed the woman. “When they are grown, they go away, even though they are near you.”

“They do, don’t they?”

“Yes, they do. Now there was mine, for example. One day he was as these, and at play beneath the workbench, in the clean litter an adz makes, and the next—for truly it seemed no more than that—they were hurting him so cruelly that my heart was breaking.”

“They?”

“They of the world, child. They were wounding him to his most grievous hurt.”

“Oh!”

“It is no matter now. They could not wound him for long. They could not really harm my son.”

The countenance of the woman was transfigured as by a softness of light from within. If she had been beautiful before, with the oval of her face framed in smooth brown hair, she was thrice beautiful as she spoke thus of her son. And, somehow, Mary Elizabeth knew that nothing could hurt him, not anything, for this was written on the countenance of his mother.

“They’ll ’most always hurt them if they can,” she said wisely. “But he —?”

“Triumphed in love,” answered the woman. “That is why I am given these to care for until they are taken away. It is his wish. Oh, he never could bear to see a

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child grieving, a little-small child. And he knew, however great had been his triumph, I would be lonely for his childhood that never could return. ‘These should content you, mother,’ he often tells me, and smiles in that way he has.”

“I would think they should,” declared Lisbeth. “Gracious, yes! What a task it must be to get them all ready for the night.”

The woman stooped to raise a little-small boy who had stumbled before her, in his eagerness to see her face. The child clutched at the curving,

glinting smoothness of her hair, as she set him down, and danced with happiness.

“There is no night here,” said the woman.

It was the oddest of answers. The girl was half-persuaded she had not heard aright, but there has been so much of strangeness along the highway that the response might be reasonable enough. Yet how could it be that night never came, with all its tender drowsiness and dreaming, to that charmed field by the river? A field of little-small children, and no night there?

“Nor is there any illness here, nor any hurt,” continued the woman, as though further to perplex her.

“And none of them is ever hurt so he cannot walk, like the little boy who lives at the Corners?” asked Mary Elizabeth wonderingly. “And they never have the whooping-cough?”

“Not here,” was the answer. “For how could such things be in this my field, among these, my children? No, not here, Mary Elizabeth.”

“But little-small children do get themselves hurt, and they do have illnesses,” insisted Lisbeth. “It seems such a very great shame that they should, but they do.”

“That is always afterward, child. For here they are as we would wish them to be, and so, of course, there is

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no pain in this field, nor any illness or unhappiness. He would not have it so.”

“I see,” said Lisbeth, but she didn’t see in the least, though she seemed to be walking in a whiteness of revelation.

“Even afterward,” continued the woman, “there are but few of them that are like the little boy who lives at the Corners. And the whooping-cough isn’t what it used to be. And after that, you must understand, and after that, it is very much like this again. Now surely you perceive how it is with them.”

“I think I do,” answered Lisbeth slowly—but she didn’t.

“It’s the world,” said the woman sufficiently.

Then Mary Elizabeth thought she understood, in the flash of an instant, for the whiteness was dazzling—but she only found herself groping again. They had drawn somewhat apart from the numberless little-small children

—how might one number the shifting play and weave of them?—and were near to the meditative river. Jumbles sighed frankly in relief.

“I think it’s very strange,” said Mary Elizabeth, as to herself. “Not one of them noticed me as we passed through the field. Not one. They couldn’t see anybody but you.” Her voice was unhappy.

“Do you think so, indeed, child?” laughed the woman. “Why, where were your eyes? Look about you!”

Two little-small children stood quite near to them, each with finger to mouth, bashfully regarding Mary Elizabeth—the boy with questioning, grave gaze, the girl with a look of merriment half-repressed. And there was something about each of them—something that reminded Mary Elizabeth of someone she could not quite recall—of someone. Her heart leaped to know they were gazing not at the woman, but at her, and to know

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also that not anywhere in the Field of Little-Small Children were children half so dear as these. She had widened her arms to them, and they were running toward her. Their lips were on her cheeks, her ears, her hair—the warmth and wonder of their low whisperings was all about her.

“My goodness-gracious!” exclaimed Lisbeth. “Just aren’t they?”

“Why, surely they are,” said the woman, as though they were anything that Lisbeth might declare. “I wondered when you would notice them. They’ve been following you all the while. They weren’t wholly happy, not even here, until you did notice them.”

And Mary Elizabeth looked up at her.

“I don’t have to give them back, do I?” she asked. “Do I? Not ever?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so, child. I thought you understood. I’m keeping them meantime. No harm shall come to them, you may be sure.”

“And I must ask—in what name shall I ask? You haven’t told me.”

“Why, you yourself were christened for me. Ask then in that name, child.”

The riddle was beyond reading, and Lisbeth made a prayer of a long look, and fixed her prayer upon the fond, maternal face. Then was the countenance of the woman wondrous to contemplate, and of a sweetness and dignity beyond telling. There was a radiance that girt her, flesh and garment. She was as cool flame. And a voice fell.

“I, too, am named Mary.”

And in that instant Lisbeth and Jumbles were soul-alone on a flowered field beside a meditative river. The shadows of the alders were lengthening. Plover were calling by the stream. No, there wasn't any woman, and

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there weren't any children. And it seemed so far, so very far, to Back of Beyond.

"There ought to be perch in that river," remarked Jumbles casually.



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CHAPTER XX.

Of how the Dark Woman came to the travelers as they rested beside the river.—And of those friends and matters that were discussed with her.—The astonishment of the Dark Woman to learn that they did not understand farewell.— Of the manner in which Lisbeth and Jumbles were sundered.—Why, there was Horsefoot!

NOW the Dark Woman came softly upon those two where they were seated in silence beside the slow river. And as one wayfarer they looked up at her, gratefully into the fathomless deeps of her eyes. She seemed taller than trees and more beautiful than mountains, yet for all this she was maternal, and near, and intimate—in her garment of seedtime and of harvest, bound with a girdle of suns and wearing the crescent moon at her breast. Together they rose to stand unafraid and unashamed in her presence, and though speech failed them it was for very gladness of welcome. Thereafter the three walked beside the river, where damsel-flies of gold and lapis lazuli are born, and they walked as of old habit.

“What have you been doing, Dark Woman, since

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that morning at Horsefoot?” asked Mary Elizabeth.

“So very many things, my dear,” said she, “’twould weary you to age if I but told the tithe of them.”

“Just now, I mean. No more than a moment before you came.”

“The tale of any moment, child, not all the books of all the world could compass. And the full tale is mine. Yet if you will consider the event, in its

relation to other events, as swifter than levin—if you will forget time—then I may answer.”

“I’ll try,” promised Mary Elizabeth.

“Well, then, even as I came upon the two of you, soundless beside this river, I sank a merchant ship in storm, whelming her with irresistible ocean, and I saved a brown cricket from the death plunge of a wounded stag.”

“The sea and the forest!” exclaimed Jumbles, and there was awe in the words.

“Why not the sea and the forest, or even the far and stranger stars, when my affairs are toward?” asked the Dark Woman. “South of Pitcairn was the ship, child, and there she bides in her appointed fathom. But east of Garm, in the green hills of the Thian Shan, were the stag and the cricket, and the cricket sings now beneath a blue flower.”

Neither Lisbeth nor Jumbles had any word to utter of these marvels that were so remote in distance—as between the wonders, on the one hand, and between themselves and either marvel, on the other—yet which had befallen within the flight of a bird from the alders to the hill. But they thought how the sea must still be troubled with the agony of the ship that was gone; and how the eyes of the stag were yet unglazed, the coat of the fallen quarry warm to the huntsman’s hand at that very instant, on a slope of the Thian Shan. Nor might



"The tale of any moment ..."

they tell themselves that the cricket should have perished, as of little worth, and the ship been spared from storm. For as they walked with the Dark Woman, they knew that never would they know her ways, yet ever must they give their faith to her. The nearness and comfort of her were alike personal and impersonal. She was capable of a great affection and concern, yet there were laws that she must keep—and she herself was but the sum of these.

"It doesn't follow," said Jumbles at length, and the thought behind the words was evident to her as any speech.

"No, child, it does not follow," she replied gravely. "For only I, and by the laws which are given, may weigh the worth of a cricket and a ship.

Now I had need of the cricket, as the law told, and my sea had need of the ship. And they that shall mourn have need of sadness. And when they have need of consoling, that also will I yield to them.”

“But the ones that were lost,” sighed Lisbeth. “I am sorry for them, Dark Woman.”

“I would not have you otherwise, my dear, and yet I tell you this—nothing is lost, not ever.”

“Not anything?”

“It is as I have said, child. Loss is for your experience, and not for mine. It is for the strengthening of a world which has need of it. But in the wisdom of those laws I must enforce, loss is a wastefulness, an impiety, not to be countenanced. Nay, it is such a thing as cannot be. Wherefore, there is no loss.”

And the three were come then to a broad dreaming of the river, which caught the sunset to its breast and held captive the golden fire in changing patterns of brightness. They paused to watch the swallows that swooped and fled above it.

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“Did you like the Gaffneys?” asked the Dark Woman presently.

“Yes!” answered the two.

“I think your visit with the Gaffneys should have made it clear to you that the law is above loss, even for mortals. That is to say, if they but follow it. As for myself, I must confess that I am partial to the Gaffneys, if partial I may ever be. And there is Adelbert the Happy. What did you think of him?”

“I was as sorry as sorry could be,” answered Lisbeth. “The poor prince was so dreadfully unhappy.”

“There is no happiness outside the law,” said the Dark Woman. “Yet it is lawful also that this blind unhappiness should trouble him. I have one surcease for Cockaigne’s prince—one only.”

“And what is that?”

“He must lift up his face to the rain.”

“It’s odd in a way, I suppose,” said Lisbeth. “But when I really learned to know Miss Tinkham’s sister, I thought of the prince. They remind me somehow of one another.”

“And naturally, my dear, because they are not unlike. Yet for Miss Tinkham’s sister the way that leads out of error is another and even simpler way.”

“Tell us!”

“She should wed the young farmer that sells green corn,” laughed the Dark Woman. “Now I must tell you a secret, children; and the secret is this—she shall!”

So they spoke of this one and of that one—of Marmaduke, and Hassan the Wanderer, and the Troubadour, and Thespia that may not quit the pool, and of the woman who walks in the Field of Little-Small Children. And the hearts of the travelers were uplifted and gladdened, their hearts were made gentle, to consider that the Dark Woman had no word of censure for any of

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these, whatever the fault, but only a compassionate understanding and sympathy. Yet for all this she caused them to remember that her laws are above everything, and are not to be disregarded—yes, she brought them to realize that even error is a form of law and of learning. But of Thespia they spoke at greater length, for Lisbeth put the question to the Dark Woman—begging her truly to tell them whether Thespia had chosen wisely or unwisely, so to spend the sum of her years beside that charmed and occult pool.

“And what is wisdom?” asked the Dark Woman. “And what, for the matter of that, may unwisdom be? Here it is that the scholars fall to quarreling, and the philosophers fail of agreement, yet it has ever seemed to me—and I should know, if any—that wisdom is with happiness and not elsewhere. For that which appears to be wise, though it is woeful, cannot be wisdom; while much that has the appearance of being unwise, yet is cleanly and wondrously happy, cannot be other than the very substance and spirit of truth. Thus it is wise. Our Thespia is happy. And are you answered, child?”

“It is as I have felt,” whispered Mary Elizabeth.

“And so it should be, my dear, for it is wisdom to feel, quite as surely as it is wisdom to reflect. Do not permit them to delude you in the matter. The ordinance of happiness is older far than that of reasoned thought.”

Then from the gray-trunked alders, from the tangle of woodbine, from the blossomed fullness of the mock-orange—all up and down the river—there issued a flight of wild birds, of song-sparrows and of finches, of cedar waxwings and of redstarts, of grosbeaks and of longspurs, of redwings and of thrushes. The birds came amazingly toward those three, with a joyous

sound of wings and of singing, and twice and thrice they wheeled and whirled, and wove and circled, around the midnight

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hair, across the eyes that are like sky before rain, and over the redness of the fond, immortal lips. And of a sudden all the birds were gone. But the Dark Woman seemed not to have noticed them.

“Yes, Thespia is happy as a bird that is come home from desolate lands,” said the Dark Woman. “One cannot doubt it. I have heard that each of you gazed into the Pool of Tears. There is small need to ask you what was mirrored there, Mary Elizabeth. Child, I had thought you much too tintured of the sun to color so. Why, Mary Elizabeth! Land sakes!”

And the Dark Woman laughed like brooks.

“Now as for you, Jumbles,” said she presently, “whose face looked back at you? Whose well remembered face?”

Then Jumbles bit his nether lip, and stood up straightly, and took the tattered cap from his head, and was as one who is most valiantly afraid. And deep into the eyes of the Dark Woman he looked, and without faltering he made answer.

“I saw her,” said Jumbles.

“So? You saw her, did you, Jumbles? That was well spoken. Yes, it was properly said, and you are quite forgiven the small falsehood with which you made reply to Thespia. Nor was it really a falsehood, since she knew; nor were you unaware of her knowing.”

There was a long and musing silence. A breeze walked on the river and rustled the alder leaves to changing silver. They heard a brown grouse chatting with her brood. They heard the murmur and whispering of those thoughts that are unspoken. The central calmness of the river was broken by a rising fish.

“I said there were perch in the river,” remarked Jumbles.

“Yon was a dace,” said the Dark Woman.

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“Oh.”

“Once there were people,” resumed the Dark Woman, “who believed the body to be a temple for the spirit. And they would have the body beautiful that it might be the fitting dwelling place for Psyche’s self. But those were pagan folk.”

And Jumbles pondered. "Pagan or not, I think that they were wise," he said.

"Yes, they were wise. Therefore, I would charge you, children, to be often with me, and frequently in my forests and my fields, or beside my lakes and streams. Be unafraid. And to think of me as a presence that shall not be taken away. Yes, think of me as motherhood. I ask your promise."

"We promise," they said.

"Now, Lisbeth, it is time you were finding Old Susie, somewhere near Horsefoot. And Jumbles, there are crates to stencil back in Pleasant Acres, where Mr. Hefflefinger has been searching for you. It grows late."

"But—" protested Jumbles, and was at loss for words.

"You are thinking of Tomorrow and Tomorrow, and of how you will contrive to find Lisbeth again. Is it not so?"

"Yes, it is so, Dark Woman."

"Well, as to that, I have no word save this—that you must find her."

"But tell me—"

"No, I may tell you nothing of the way, you cheerless and most unbelieving boy. Why do you think I have troubled myself to yield you this young journeying? And does it not suffice for faith? She shames you, does this girl. Answer me, Mary Elizabeth. Will he come?"

"Yes, he will come," said the girl.

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"I've a war to wage, and a queen to throne, and in Thibet there are wolves to be whelped. Make haste, children!"

"With what?" asked Jumbles wonderingly.

"With your farewells, my gosling that so lately played at farewell and liked it not at all. Bid the girl goodbye with a kiss, and have done with it."

"With a—with a—a what?" stammered Jumbles.

"How else? Great constellations! Can such things really be? Do you mean to tell me, you two, that you have spent these golden days together and never once have so caressed each other? I can't believe it!"

"Well, anyway, he hasn't," confessed Mary Elizabeth meekly, and her gray eyes were lowered. "Not ever!"

"My gracious! Why, I must be getting old!"

Jumbles turned slowly toward the girl, and there was song in his thought, and prayer, and praise. And Lisbeth lifted her gaze to his, and in her eyes was a shy gladness of fear.

“Now kiss her soundly, Jumbles!” laughed the Dark Woman, and the boy held forth his arms.

Then were those two swept apart, recedingly, before their lips were given, as though by sundering and giant winds—their arms outstretched, their eyes yearning. Oh, swiftly were they sundered and made far, and Lisbeth cried out to her companion of the glad days, as they were borne apart. She cried out to the distant and increasing dimness that was Jumbles.

“Jumbles!” she cried.

“Lisbeth!” came the fading answer.

And in that instant Mary Elizabeth discovered herself again beside Horsefoot, under the low-voiced cedar, with the selfsame wood duck glinting down to the water. Nor could the hour have been much past noon,

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and yonder was Old Susie peering at her from the willows, while a red calf with a star in its forehead made shift to stand upon its trembling legs.

“I don’t quite understand,” said Mary Elizabeth to herself. “Oh, I don’t quite understand!”

And she heard Aunt Emma calling.



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CHAPTER XXI.

Being the very beginning again, and this is odd, of the story of Mary Elizabeth.—How she waited at Back of Beyond and did her hair a new way.—Of Uncle Henry's resolve to have a hired hand.—And of the divination of Dewey.—How at long last somebody did come.—Yes, really.



OF COURSE, Aunt Emma wanted to know where Mary Elizabeth had been for such a great length of time, but when it became evident that Aunt Emma was thinking of hours, while Mary Elizabeth was reckoning it in days—though somewhat guardedly—there was really no hope of their understanding one another. One cannot, as you will readily comprehend, announce that one has been to the remote and remarkable Country of Cockaigne, and expect an Aunt Emma to restrain her annoyed incredulity. And one does not repeat the instance.

“Why, the very idea!” exclaimed Aunt Emma, with amused impatience. “Folks with their noses in books! But your mother was like that, too. As for me I’ve a better use for my time, I’m sure.”

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Nor may you confide in an Uncle Henry, for the matter of that, even though he is versed in “The Swiss Family Robinson” and “Frank on a Gunboat.” He will fail you—kindly enough, it is true, but nevertheless he will fail you. He will be thinking of manures and of cold frames, of ensilage and of early potatoes, and of such practical though recondite concerns as these. And it will be evident to you that, for all his good-

humored pretense of attention, he is in point of fact mentally hoeing the Early Roses.

“Gaffney?” repeated Uncle Henry, “Gaffney? Grows turnips, you say? Never heard of the man, Mary Elizabeth—and no more did you, I reckon. How like your mother you are, for a fact.”

“In what way am I like her, Uncle Henry?”

“In every way; in just about every way I can imagine. Your mother was a great hand for making stories that sounded as good as a book. Now you run and fetch me the hoe, the narrer one, like a good girl.”

And so, after a time, you hide the eager words within yourself, and set a seal upon them, and share them only with such venerable and sympathetic dogs as Dewey, or such exceptional and sagacious yellow cats as Yowler. For this is your duty to that which you have known, and which you hunger to impart to others. You must guard it against unbelief and laughter. You must guard it against hurt. For if it be disbelieved, then you yourself are wounded and brought near to tears. So Mary Elizabeth hid her great adventure ever so carefully away, nor spoke of it again—however circumspectly—to her aunt and uncle. And the years went by, some two or three of them, and she grew taller, and did her hair in a new way—and very gradually the memories faded. They faded like colored prints that have been forgotten under the apple tree.

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Yes, they faded until she could not quite be certain whether she ever had walked the highway, or had only dreamed of walking. And the good friends she had met there took on a semblance of legend and myth—save only the friend that was James Christopher. The calm, strange beauty of Mrs. Gaffney, the sadness of Prince Adelbert, the charmed happiness of Thespia beside the pool—these and everything else seemed never to have been, or to have been observed by someone other than herself, and so narrated to her. Save only Jumbles. And very singular it was that Jumbles, of all that varied company, alone should be changeless and real. She sat often beside Horsefoot, but the Dark Woman did not come to her—and the Dark Woman, too, became a figure of dream.

“A body would think you’d get tired of Horsefoot, you spend so much of your time there,” complained Aunt Emma.

“It’s lovely beside Horsefoot,” answered Mary Elizabeth. “And the wood ducks have young ones.”

“Just the same it isn’t good for you, to idle around in that dampness. Why you don’t catch your death of cold beats me. And the cat has your tongue for hours and hours, whenever you’ve been to Horsefoot. Folks with their noses in books are always like that, I dare say.”

“Now please don’t worry about me, Aunt Emma,” begged Mary Elizabeth. “I shan’t go again if you mind it so dreadfully.”

“Lands sakes, child! I’m sure I don’t care how often you go. I’ll say this for you—your work is always done up. It’s only—”

“It’s only what, Aunt Emma?”

“It’s only that your mother was like that, too,” sighed her aunt.

The seasons plodded by at Back of Beyond, and Nobody

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to Speak of Ever Came and Nothing Much Ever Happened. They watched the road that ribboned down to the turn, when it was dark with rain, or gray with summer, or smooth and glistening with white winter. And there were times when one or another of them cried out that somebody was coming, but it never really proved to be anybody. It would be a fisherman, asking his way across the tumbled hills; or a hunter inquiring where the grouse were feeding; or a neighbor from below the turn, seeking the loan of a plow; or a loquacious, insistent salesman of lightning rods. But only such as these. And Mary Elizabeth felt a small grievance against the road, as though it were possessed of sentience and knew that it was thwarting her. Nevertheless, she looked often down the curving length of it.

Meantime they prospered at Back of Beyond, for the crops were heavier than any they had known, and their cattle increased surprisingly. The toil that Uncle Henry had expended on those acres—the somewhat unimaginative but purposeful toil—seemed at length to have inspired their fruitfulness. Yet there is no blessing, or not often, that is without its minor blemish. And Uncle Henry was troubled more frequently with his rheumatism, so that he began to speak of hired help, at least for the haying, and to vow that he must go down to town and look about for a likely hand.

It was June again, and the sleepy morning wonder of the month was over the hill-land. It was about the middle of June, and the sweetbrier was pink along the fences, and the breath of the sweetbrier was everywhere.

“He’d have to be a good hand, strong and willing,” declared Uncle Henry. “He’d have to take an interest in things, or he couldn’t work for me. No, sir!”

“I think you shouldn’t put it off any longer,” said Aunt Emma. “My gracious, Henry, you’ll kill yourself

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a-working, I declare. As it is, you’re plumb tuckered out come nightfall. And then there’s the cows to milk.”

“I guess so,” said Uncle Henry.

So on this morning, midway of June in the hills, while Mary Elizabeth was sweeping the porch, and Yowler was sound asleep beside the brown churn, and Dewey was reflecting on the days that are done and may not come again, Uncle Henry issued forth to throw the harness on the team and hitch up the light wagon. Aunt Emma couldn’t go to town with him, because there was the mending. And Mary Elizabeth couldn’t go either, because there was the baking. But you may well assure yourself that all was excitement, for it was no commonplace decision that had been made at Back of Beyond. And yet, after all, Uncle Henry did not drive down to town that day. Not that day.

And the reason he did not drive down, the reason he took the harness off again, was infallibly predicted by Dewey the dog, who suddenly abandoned his meditations to stare with interest down the dusty road. His ears were up and drooping at the tips, to lose no fraction of the sounds the others could not hear, and his tail thumped occasionally on the clay. Then Uncle Henry paused, with a bridle in hand; and Aunt Emma did not go into the kitchen, as she had intended; and Mary Elizabeth ceased to ply her broom. All three of them looked at Dewey, where Dewey sat looking at the road, and then there were four of them gazing toward the turn. They said no word until around the turn, ’way down the last long curving mile that led to Back of Beyond, came a walker. And then they said—all four together, for Dewey barked—they said breathlessly:

“Here comes somebody!”

So Uncle Henry put off his hitching, and Aunt Emma put off her mending, and Mary Elizabeth put

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off her sweeping, to watch somebody come up the dusty road. Uncle Henry declared he couldn’t imagine who it might be, nor could Aunt Emma—but Mary Elizabeth said nothing whatever, for it was as though her heart were in her throat. It couldn’t possibly be true, she told herself. For surely such a

thing could never happen. But even at the distance of a mile there was something in the stride of the walker, the blithe, assured young stride, that brought a thousand memories back to her with a rush. And at half a mile, while Aunt Emma and Uncle Henry puttered about the yard, pretending to be busy, she determined that he was taller than she remembered. And when he was no farther than the fence-corner, or scarcely farther than that, the astonishing certainty of it left her breathless, and reddened her cheek, and caused her to drop the broom. For the walker was dressed in denims, and he wore a slouched cap most jauntily over one eye, and he was whistling—a tuneless, clear and happy whistle. Mary Elizabeth would have called to him, but she realized that this would never do. She would have hastened toward him—but this also could not be. And so she solved it all by running into the house, and being ever so industrious.

Now how could Mary Elizabeth have been certain? For she was certain as certain could be. Yet in answer to this, it may be replied that anyone should have been certain—had anyone been to Cockaigne with a comrade, and to the Pool of Tears, and down the highway to the Field of Little-Small Children, and to the river where they walked with the Dark Woman. Yes, well might anyone.

Through the open window, where dimity swayed to the breeze, she heard them talking. Why, it could be no other! And she heard Uncle Henry give decision.

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“Well, then,” said Uncle Henry, “turn the team in the pasture, for I won’t be going down. And mind you fasten the gate. Tomorrow we’ll start cutting the lower twenty.”

The swing of his stride, the set of his broad young shoulders, the tone of a well-remembered voice, the tilt of his cap—these and the frightened gayness of her heart made certain of the fact. Well? There is one of the *Lepidoptera*, it is told, that journeys over plain and mountain, on unerring wings, to find that other one, though she be prisoned in the central desert. Why not?

“Name’s Jim,” volunteered Uncle Henry, stomping into the kitchen. “He’s from Back East somewheres.”

And how was Uncle Henry to know this wasn’t really the name for him? Yes, how was he to guess that Mary Elizabeth knew a great deal he could never know?

“Strong and likely,” added Uncle Henry. “Seemed willing.”

“I’d just a glimpse of him,” said Mary Elizabeth. “I thought his ears looked sort of funny.”

Ah, treason! But a dear treason, nevertheless. For Uncle Henry also was betrayed by it. And her tone had been without more than idle interest.

“What say? His ears? They do stick out a bit, and that’s a fact. He’s one of them light-complected young fellers, what’ll look you straight in the face. Yep. Strong and likely. Seemed willing, too.”

“But his eyes are brown,” said Mary Elizabeth innocently. And this was a second treachery.

“I don’t for the life of me see what difference it makes!” exclaimed Uncle Henry. “But his eyes ain’t brown. They’re blue as mud! Name’s Jim.”

Oh, it was difficult not to correct him.

“Dewey taken to him right away,” continued Uncle

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Henry. “Acted as though he’d knowed him for years. That’s a good sign.”

“Dewey would,” said Mary Elizabeth with conviction.

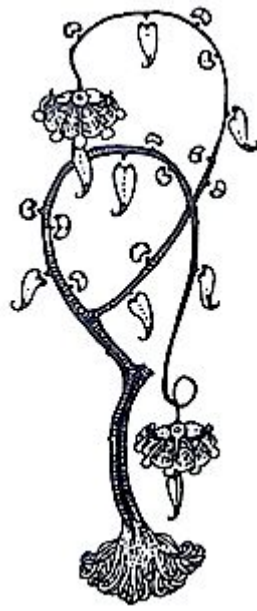
“What say?”

“Nothing, Uncle Henry.”

They are as easy as that to delude. They are so delightfully simple. Mary Elizabeth felt fondly superior to her Uncle Henry. All of a sudden she felt like Uncle Henry’s mother! She went to him where he sat, and kissed him on the graying stubble of his cheek. And Uncle Henry failed to understand this, as well.

You were warned that you wouldn’t believe. Not you. Belief is ever so hard to come by. Unless.

And it was noonday in June, with bread baking, at Back of Beyond.



About the Author



Ben Hur Lampman, one of Oregon's most popular writers in the first half of the twentieth century, was a longtime columnist for the *Oregonian*. His prolific writing, however, ranged beyond daily journalism into magazine fiction, poetry, a novel, and several nonfiction books.

Oregonian editor Edgar B. Piper called Lampman the most versatile writer he knew, a "reporter, commentator, storyteller, naturalist, historian and poet." Lampman's "ear for the vibrant, homely phrase," Edward Weeks, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, wrote, "makes him the best teller of the colloquial tale since Ring Lardner."

Born in Barron, Wisconsin, Lampman grew up in tiny Neche, North Dakota, where his father edited the local newspaper. He began his journalism career at age nineteen, when he established and edited the *Arena*, a county newspaper in Michigan City, North Dakota. He married Lena McEwen Sheldon, who had moved from New York to North Dakota to teach school. Lampman's first book, a compilation of poems and newspaper editorials, carries this dedication: "To Lena, who is very patient with me, but holds that the kitchen is not the place to clean fish."

In 1912, Lampman moved to Gold Hill, where he edited the weekly *Gold Hill News*. He also spent as much time as he could fishing the Rogue River.

In 1916, he moved to Portland to work for the Oregonian, where he was a reporter and later an editorial writer and columnist. He also contributed essays and stories to the Saturday Evening Post, Sunset, and other magazines. In 1943, Lampman won an O. Henry Award for his short story “Blinker Was a Good Dog,” published in the Atlantic. His novel, Here Comes Somebody, was published in 1935.

Lampman was a master of the short verbal sketch, a mini-essay inspired by ordinary turns of everyday life. He could find insight—leavened by wry humor and playful language—in the most mundane happenstance. One column ruminated on how urban bystanders act when a pedestrian’s hat blows off in a gust of wind. Others dealt with the dilemma of the “returned vacationist,” Armistice Day, a bootlegger’s dead dog, a garden spider, pipe smoking, wild ducks. Many reflected on Oregon’s natural landscape. “If you should see a crow against sunrise, as you read,” he wrote in the preface to one collection, “or hear the drums of ocean, or be moved to a mood of kindness toward all creatures great and small, I am repaid and well content.”

A reader’s question about where to bury a dog provoked a widely circulated column with this punch line: “The one best place to bury a good dog is in the heart of its master.”

Lampman was named Oregon’s poet laureate in 1951. He held that post until his death in 1954 at age sixty-seven. He is buried in Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Portland.

